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**Lesson 11 – “You Believe What?”**

**Standing for Truth in a Compromised World**

Our lessons so far have dealt with questions of humanity, gender, and what it means that God created us the way He did. As we have studied God’s Word, we have also seen how the culture around us thinks very differently than God’s Word on several key issues. But it’s one thing to know what we believe and why the world is wrong. It’s another thing for us to go out into that world as teachers, doctors, factory workers, plumbers, or any other profession and be told there will be a mandatory diversity, equity, and inclusion seminar. In this final lesson, we will focus not so much on what believers should think, but on how they should interact with those who think radically differently.

***How would you summarize, in a sentence or two, the way believers should interact with the world around them?***

As we think through how we should respond to the world, our response will need at least three things. First, we will need courage. We will need the grace of God to take a strong stand for what the Bible says and not blink when people hate us for it. Second, we will need compassion. We should take a strong stand, but our stand for God’s Word is not at odds with love for the unbeliever. Finally, we will often find ourselves in situations where it is difficult to tell exactly how these two will fit together. We will find ourselves not sure what we should say or do, or what we can allow and what we must reject. In situations like these, we will need biblical wisdom. Like Daniel, we will find ourselves navigating Babylon while striving to stay true to our God. Living for God in a hostile world will take courage, compassion, and wisdom.

***Which of these three responses do you think is hardest for the church? For you personally?***

**Responding to the World with Courage**

Everyone wants to fit. Elementary age children want to have a best friend, high schoolers want to know they are cool, and in truth most adults still want to be accepted by those around them. While this desire for acceptance is normal, it can be dangerous. The Bible warns us about the fear of man (Proverbs 29:25), and the temptation to bow to what the world demands, or perhaps even to compromise a little, can be quite strong and requires us to have great courage.

**Preparing for Persecution**

Peter warned his readers not to be surprised by the fiery trial that came upon them, as though something strange were happening (1 Peter 4:12). Jesus told His followers that if they rejected Him, the Master, they would certainly reject His disciples, the servants (John 15:20). The Bible tells us that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). The message comes through repeatedly: if you take a stand for Christ you will be resisted.

***Why are believers still surprised when they face resistance for their faith, even though Scripture is clear they will?***

***Some might be tempted to hear this warning about persecution and think, “Well, that’s for believers facing real problems, not for people living in cushy America like me.” What is wrong with such thinking?***

Sometimes the greatest dangers are not the ones that run at you screaming, but the ones that sneak up behind you and simply ask why you won’t just go along like everyone else. One author, warning about the dangers of pop culture, made the following observation: “Physical affliction (even to the point of death) for the sake of Christ is a heavy cross, but at least it can be readily recognized at the time as a trial of faith. But the erosion of character, the spoiling of innocent pleasures, and the cheapening of life itself that often accompany modern popular culture can occur so subtly that we believe nothing has happened.”[[1]](#footnote-1) What this author said regarding pop culture is in many ways true of resistance we feel in America. No one is dragging us to court and calling for us to be crucified, but sometimes the small temptations to cave here or there in order to save face or stay on track for a raise can seem can be easier to let slide than the call to deny Christ or die.

***Why do you think that many people have problems with standing for Christ in little moments of compromise?***

***How can Christians take a courageous stand on controversial issues?***

**Praying for Power**

If standing for Christ will require boldness, then we need to pray for boldness. Whenever Christians find themselves suffering for Christ, they should ask for boldness. The young church faced opposition, and their response was to pray for boldness (Acts 4:29-31). Interestingly, this came right after they had been bold in standing for Christ! Peter and John had proclaimed Christ (Acts 4:5-12), been warned not to do that again (Acts 4:17-18), and when they joined with the believers, they thanked God and asked for boldness. Peter was no doubt quite aware of how easy it could be stand for Jesus one minute and deny Him the next, so this time around He made sure to pray (cf Mark 14:37-38). Paul is another example of someone we think of as a bold witness, yet he too asked for prayer that he would speak boldly (Ephesians 6:19-20).

***What keeps us from praying for boldness?***

**Responding to the World with Compassion**

What counts as hatred? It’s quite common these days to hear that if you don’t fully support someone’s identity, then you must hate them and are seeking to erase their existence. To many in the world today, the only compassionate response to someone is to affirm them. But is this right?

**Real Compassion Tells the Truth**

If we are going to be truly compassionate, that doesn’t mean we tell people what they want to hear. In fact, many times the most loving thing we can do is to tell people what they don’t want to hear (Proverbs 27:6; Psalm 141:5). Sometimes the things we believe and hold dear are wrong, and in those instances the most compassionate thing you can do is to lovingly warn someone.

***Why do people equate helping people with making them feel good about whatever they believe?***

The ultimate example of compassion is Jesus. We are told that when He saw the crowds, He was moved with compassion (Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32). We see Him weep over Jerusalem, the city that had rejected God’s Word over and over (Matthew 23:37-39). But Jesus never backed down from the truth to show compassion. His compassion didn’t stop Him from calling out the Pharisees for their sin (Matthew 23) or strongly rebuking His disciples when they needed it (Matthew 16:23). Love and compassion are not at odds with the truth. Love and compassion will mean telling the truth.

***Can you think of other biblical examples of people who said the truth when it needed to be said?***

**Real Compassion Speaks Kindly**

Biblical compassion flows from a recognition that those who are the enemies of God have been taken captive by Satan (2 Timothy 2:25-26). They are not the ultimate enemy; they are under his control. We sometimes need to tell harsh truths, but we don’t need to be harsh in the way we say it. The Bible encourages believers to take a stand that is gracious and kind as we live in the midst of a perverse world (Colossians 4:5-6; 2 Timothy 2:25). We can be truthful without be nasty. We can be kind without compromising.

***What is the difference between being courageous and being harsh?***

***What is the difference between being compassionate and compromising?***

***Can you think of biblical examples of those who took a stand without being nasty and without compromising?***

**Responding to the World with Wisdom**

“If I try and bend that far I’ll break.” So says Tevye, the main character in Fiddler on the Roof. Tevye had been trying to navigate a complex and changing world. On certain matters, he decided that he could remain faithful to what he had been taught, even if that looked different than he had originally thought. But he recognized he couldn’t bend forever; eventually he had to put his foot down and say, “No more.” Daniel faced similar challenges going to Babylon. He was a faithful Jew who was committed to remain faithful to God, even though that meant no sacrifice, no temple, and a full Babylon education.

We’ll look briefly at several key points in Daniel’s ministry. We won’t get ironclad: “Do this” or “Don’t do that” from these examples, but they should give us some principles for thinking through how we can wisely live for God in a crooked world.

**Daniel Looked for Solutions (Daniel 1)**

The issue of living in a foreign culture immediately caused problems for young captive Daniel and his friends. As soon as he arrived, he was given a heaping plate of food that he had determined he could not eat as a Jew (Daniel 1:8). So how did he respond? By flipping the table? By chucking the plate back into the kitchen? By yelling “Get that trash out of here! I’m pure unlike all you sickos!”? No, he did it by asking nicely (Daniel 1:9). But notice that when Daniel received reasonable pushback, he didn’t become unreasonable (Daniel 1:10-13). Instead, he sought to provide a solution that made sense to his captor.

***How can believers today follow the pattern of Daniel?***

***Why do we often fail to look for solutions that can help us in such tough situations?***

**Daniel Cared for Babylon (Daniel 4)**

How would you feel if someone kidnapped you and dragged you hundreds of miles from your home? What if they then forced you to work for them? What if you then found out something really bad was about to happen to them? How would you feel? This is the situation Daniel finds himself in when Nebuchadnezzar has a dream and needs an interpretation. Daniel learns what the dream means: God is going to punish Nebuchadnezzar for his pride (Daniel 4:19, 24-26).

But Daniel isn’t happy about it. He isn’t excited that Nebuchadnezzar is “getting what’s coming to him.” Instead, he pleads with Nebuchadnezzar to change his ways that he might be spared this judgment. Don’t miss this: ***Nebuchadnezzar kidnapped Daniel and burned his home to the ground, and Daniel appealed to him to repent and be spared.*** Unlike Jonah, who was giddy at the thought of God’s judgment coming on Nineveh and upset when that didn’t happen, Daniel pleaded with Nebuchadnezzar to change his mind before it was too late.

***Why do you think Jonah got upset when Nineveh repented but Daniel caringly called on Nebuchadnezzar to repent?***

Is it possible for Christians to care for a nation that is wicked, while still grieving for that nation and warning it? Can you work for a boss that rejects God and celebrates what God hates and yet be loyal to your boss and want what is best for them? Daniel shows us that we can care for our neighbor, family, country, and job even if we find ourselves opposed to much of what they stand for. Courage doesn’t always mean quitting.

***Daniel had no choice but to be in Babylon, but in corporate America most people have some control over where they work. At what point should a Christian leave a job that is increasingly compromised on issues of biblical morality?***

**Daniel Took a Stand When It Cost Him (Daniel 6)**

It might be tempting at this point to assume that Daniel was just an expert on squeaking by without causing any trouble. But the last story in particular shows us that sometimes, courage means taking an intentional stand knowing full well the consequences. In this well-known story, a law is passed that no one is allowed to pray to anyone except the king for 30 days. Daniel’s response is to keep praying as he had been regularly (Daniel 6:10).

***Why didn’t Daniel try to hide his prayers? Why open the window and do it regularly 3 times a day in your house? Why not switch it up?***

Sometimes you will face a challenging situation and there will be a Daniel 1 solution – let’s talk about this and see if there is a middle road we can both agree to. Sometimes the only possible solution is a Daniel 6 solution – I can’t and won’t do that and I’m ready to face the consequences. Wisdom doesn’t always mean getting out of a tough situation. Sometimes it means knowing that a tough situation is coming up and being ready to take a stand through it.

We live in a world that is increasingly hostile to God and His Word. Living, working, and interacting in our culture is inevitably going to bring conflict; the question is not “if” but “when.” Although there is no one size fits all solution, Christians should seek to be courageous, compassionate, and wise in all their interactions with a watching world. We should be in prayer, and we should be seeking counsel and encouragement from one another. And we should go out with an expectant faith, realizing that like Daniel, God can use us as a far greater force for good in this world than we would have thought.

***What kind of impact can a courageous, compassionate, and wise Christian influence have in its immediate sphere (family, work, nation)?***

1. Ken Myers, *All God’s Children in Blue Suede Shoes*, kindle edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)