

The Church in Babylon

Study Notes

Session Two

“Conflicts of Conscience”

A. Conflict of Conscience

1. **Big Question:** How far can we engage our culture without compromising our convictions? Where do we draw the line between infiltration and contamination?

2. **Possibly Conflicts with Culture**
 - a. **State and Federal Laws:** How do we live when state and federal laws require us to violate God’s Word?
 - **Example:** Florists, photographers, and bakers who, on religious grounds, have a deep conviction that they should not bake cakes, provide flowers for, or take photographs of a “same-sex wedding.” The Supreme Court ruled in favor of Masterpiece Cakeshop (2018), but such a ruling will certainly be challenged (and possibly overturned) in the years ahead.

 - b. **Workplace:** How do we respond when business owners, managers, or companies require us as employees to violate our biblical beliefs?
 - **Example:** In some places, teachers are being required to refer to biological male students with female pronouns and names (e.g. Bert must be called Bernice at school). Do Christian teachers affirm transgenderism? In other workplaces, Bibles are forbidden from desks, symbolic jewelry cannot be worn, conversations about faith are prohibited, and prayer groups must meet offsite.

 - c. **Domestic:** How do we navigate issues inside our family when people clearly violate Scripture, or ask us to affirm or celebrate their decisions?
 - **Example:** Would it be ok if a Christian parent or relative attended the wedding ceremony of a homosexual family member? Would this be a sign of God’s love towards sinners, or approval of the sin?

3. **Where to Draw the Line**
 - a. **Background:** One of the most famous exiles was a young man named Daniel, who along with several of his friends were selected to serve King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. Even though the Babylonian culture was filled with paganism and cultic practices, Daniel and his friends learned how to live as light without walking in darkness. They also proved that when God judges a nation, the righteous suffer alongside the wicked – an idea that many believers are slow to grasp today. However, Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and

Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) were very intelligent and filled with leadership potential. For this reason, King Nebuchadnezzar “*assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank...they were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were stand before the king*” (Dan. 1:5-6). In other words, they would have learned the Akkadian language and been immersed in the Babylonian lifestyle (e.g., food, clothing, literature, entertainment, recreation, religion, wisdom, daily living, etc.). According to Larry Osborne, “*Babylon was also known for its demonic influences...the state-sponsored religion was satanic, and the core curriculum in the schools of higher learning included a large dose of the astrology and the occult.*” In fact, Daniel’s name was changed to “*Beltshazzar*” (1:7); from “*God is my judge*” to “*Bel’s prince,*” which was a title for the demonic god Marduk (the equivalent of being called “*Satan’s prince*” today!). All of this would hopefully prepare them to serve the king in important political and social assignments.

- **Point:** While these four men had every reason to hate and oppose King Nebuchadnezzar for his cruelty, for stealing their freedoms, and for dishonoring their faith tradition, they were reminded that God had them in this position for an important reason. In other words, don’t hate your enemy, serve him.
- b. **Drawing the Line:** “*But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself*” (Dan. 1:8). In other words, while Daniel had been enslaved and immersed in the pagan culture, he firmly decided that he would not join in on the things that were against God’s will. His outlook was, “*I can help the king, I can advise the king, but I will not compromise my faith in Yahweh.*” It was all a matter of resolve. And God took care of them, proving that “*God will keep us where He plants us*” (Lutzer).
- **Food:** Daniel and his friends refused the king’s food and resolved only to consume water and vegetables (Dan. 1:12-13). It’s not clear what was wrong with the king’s food and drink, but most likely it had been offered to idols and/or contained something outside of God’s law. However, they resisted, and God gave them strength.
 - **Prayer:** Daniel was told that if he prayed to God he would be thrown to the lions. He continued to pray, was thrown to the lions, but God protected him (Dan. 6:7).
 - **Worship:** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were told to bow down to the golden image or die. They chose to worship God alone and were thrown into the fiery furnace, but God joined them inside and protected them from the flames (Dan. 3:1-30).

4. Navigating Our Cultural Challenges

a. We must see God, not Marduk

- **Problem:** King Nebuchadnezzar was convinced that Marduk answered prayers. According to Daniel 1:1-2, “*Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it...[and took] some of the vessels of the house of God...to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.*” He was convinced that Marduk defeated Yahweh, and Daniel and his friends would have been tempted to think the same.

- **Question:** Do you ever look at the state of our nation and wonder if Christ has been defeated? Does it appear that the fallen, rebellious world has won?
- **Point:** We must not forget that Daniel 1:2 says, *“The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God...”* The writer continues, *“And God gave Daniel favor...”* (1:9); *“God gave [the four youths] learning and skill in all literature and wisdom...understanding in vision and dreams”* (1:17). These verses and others remind us that in the middle of what appears to be defeat, God is in control of the whole process. God is sovereign. The devil’s victories are only temporary and allowed by God to fulfill His greater will. Therefore, we can face our present dilemmas with confidence and triumph! If we seek God in faith, humility, and repentance, we can count on His favor. Regardless of what takes place in the world, the promises of God for His people are still in place. Living in light of this truth makes all the difference.

b. **We must distinguish “association with” and “participation in”**

- **Problem:** Daniel and his friends could have been accused of participating with the pagan king, but they made sure that they merely associated with him. While they resisted eating his food, they incorporated an alternate diet that would work better.
- **Question:** Are there ways we can resist participating in sinful activities by looking for an alternative that would be acceptable? Is it possible to associate with someone, while not affirming or practicing what they are doing?
- **1 Corinthians 5:9-11** – *“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.”*
- **Point:** It is possible to broaden our friendships and associations without crossing the line into participation. However, the line might be slightly different for some. We would never want to do anything that might confuse others or give them the wrong impression. If we need help deciding, God always promises to give wisdom to those who sincerely ask (James 1:5). Reaching the world doesn’t mean to retreat, but to resist participation.

c. **We must appreciate the latitude of conscience**

- **Problem:** There are many moral issues that the Bible is 100% clear on what to do. However, there are other issues that the Bible doesn’t give an answer one way or the other. Christians are left to make decisions based on their conscience.
- **Romans 14:2–4, 13** – *“One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another... Therefore, let us not pass*

judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.”

- **Examples:** Is it wrong for a mother to attend her daughter’s same-sex marriage ceremony? One mother might say, “Yes, I do not want to affirm and support this lifestyle.” Another mother might say, “No, I don’t agree with what she’s doing, but I always want her to know that I love her.” Arguments could be made that both views are acceptable. Another example might be whether it’s acceptable for a baker or photography to perform services for such a wedding. Even if the vender doesn’t believe the marriage is morally right, is it wrong to earn an income from offering a service?
- **Point:** There are some issues that are not black-and-white in the Bible, so our person conscience must guide us into the right decision. However, Paul warns, “For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). Contrary to popular culture, love can say “no.”

d. **We must have deep personal convictions**

- **Problem:** There are times when we must take bold stands for Christ, regardless of the outcome. Even if it means losing a job, a spot on the team, a promising career, or a family member or friend, maintaining deep personal convictions about biblical truth is most important.
- **Quote:** *“Here I stand. I can do no other. To go against conscience is neither right nor safe.”* – Martin Luther
- **Example:** When East Germany was behind the Berlin Wall, under the rule of communism, people were warned, *“If you go to church, your kids can’t go to university. You won’t get any promotions, and you will be given the poorest paying jobs.”*
- **Point:** Believers must be willing to stand against sin and live in righteousness. Otherwise, the light of Christ would not shine in a dark world.
- **John 12:24-25** – *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in the world will keep it for eternal life.”*