

## Reflection - No Other Gods

by Larry Totzke

### Three Men in a Fiery Furnace

The small group I lead has continued to meet during COVID-19 using the Zoom application. It's different, but it surely beats not meeting at all. Three weeks ago we launched into a study of the Old Testament book of Daniel. This week's study had us in Daniel chapter three about three Jewish men being thrown into a fiery furnace. They were thrown in there because they refused to bow down to a 90 feet high by nine feet wide golden statue the king had erected. You may know this story about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

The primary takeaway from this story is that these men were willing to risk their lives for not being willing to bow down to an idol. They essentially said that they would place their faith in their God whether he protected them from the flames or not. The irony of the story is that they were only in this situation because their forefathers had repeatedly, for around two thousand years, done exactly the opposite.

About 1400 B.C. God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and guided them into the desert where he formed them into a nation over 40 years. Early in that process he gave them 10 commandments to follow and a whole bunch of other laws. The first of these 10 commandments is quoted in Old English, "*Thou shall have no other gods before me.*" The God of the Bible made it clear that he was to be their God and they were not to worship any other god. He also made it clear that he was far superior to any other god, and he did it on multiple occasions. But God had hardly gotten the words out of his mouth before the Israelites molded a golden calf to worship as an image of god. God was not happy!

After 40 hard years in the desert wilderness, the Israelites finally made it into the land of Canaan, which God had promised to Abraham, Issac, and Jacob over 400 years before. He gave explicit instructions to their new leader, Joshua to completely destroy all of the people and possessions residing in the land, or, if they didn't, it would come back to haunt them. Well, they didn't, and it did. Over the ensuing 800 years the Israelites, by then called Jews, were continuously plagued by remnants of those people groups they were supposed to have destroyed. And the biggest nemesis was the collection of gods these

people groups worshipped. They continuously violated the first commandment: *“Thou shalt have NO other gods before me.”*

Finally, after about 800 more years, God allowed the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar to conquer the Jewish nation, destroy their temple, and take many Jews captive. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, along with Daniel, were among the earliest captives to be taken; however, they were all given prominent positions in the king’s service. When they refused to bow down to this very large statue, it was a big deal. You might say that they broke the chain of Jews breaking the first commandment.

### **Idols and the New Testament Church**

One of the purposes of Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi is to encourage them that, *“At the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father”* (Philippians 2:10-11 - ESV). There were opponents of the early church who wanted to add other requirements to the Gospel message, essentially creating idols to worship. Paul took them back to the first commandment, by reminding them that there is only one God, and He is more than sufficient to meet every need.

### **Idols and the Church Today**

It is fair to ask, “Is idol worship a problem in the church today?” It is also fair to answer, “YES, absolutely!” Most of us in our culture consider ourselves way too sophisticated to worship a golden statue or any other inanimate object, but we easily fall into the trap of idolatry in other forms. A very simple definition of idolatry is putting one’s faith or trust in anyone or anything in place of or before God. We trust in wealth because we think it will make us happy and secure. We honor athletes, actors, musicians, etc. because they give us pleasure. We put our trust in governments because we think they will meet our needs. And in every case these people or institutions come up short.

Is it wrong to accumulate wealth? Of course not! The Bible doesn’t say that money is the root of all evil; it says that the **love of money** is.

Is it wrong to enjoy sports, movies, or music? Of course not! God created people with incredible talent for us to enjoy, but he didn’t create them for us to worship.

Is it wrong to look to the government for safety and protection? Of course not! The Bible says that governing authorities have been instituted by God. But, to place your faith and trust in them above God, is to worship an idol.

Perhaps, as we face these unsettling times, we should be ever mindful of the first commandment, "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me,*" and take to heart the words of Philippians 2:10-11, "*At the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.*"