

Classic Christian Writings:

When we read Daniel 9:3-19, and place one word over verse three to describe what we read there, it would probably be the word "intensity." Daniel is a man hard after the Lord God! This is a man serious about finding his God in prayer.

"I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes..." (Daniel 9:3).

As Daniel prepares to pray, we observe that Daniel is not presumptuous. He does not suggest that he has found his God, but only that he is setting himself to find Him. He is preparing himself to seek God. Verse three is significant; it is making ready to pray.

It is important to take note of the preparation for prayer. One of the greatest hindrances to effectual, fervent praying in the life of the believer is the absence of preparation in our praying. We rush into what we think is prayer with little or no time spent in simply waiting first on the Holy Spirit to take our thoughts under His control, to permeate our very beings with His presence. We don't take time to think upon the One we are about to approach in words. We don't "still" ourselves before the Throne. "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). The man who would find God in prayer is the man who waits upon God before prayer. He's the man who refuses to rush into God's presence.

I believe Daniel fasted and lay in sackcloth and ashes before he uttered a single word to God. Then came his beautiful petition.

Addressing God In High Regard

The first thing we see here is the great respect, the high regard Daniel demonstrates in addressing his God. To Daniel He is "O, Lord, the great and dreadful God..." How the Lord's name has been degraded with the passage of time! How Christians themselves have been swept into the current of disrespect for the things of God, for His great name, for His great and infinite Person. We need to be reminded of the unbelievable condescension of a holy God to even allow us to utter His great name, to speak a word in His presence.

"And I prayed unto the Lord my God...and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God!" (Daniel 9:4). In my lifetime I have seen creep into the Church a lightness of attitude of spirit, a spirit of triviality, a blasphemous placement of the things of an almighty, holy God and the things of His glorious Word into the commonplace and the ordinary.

Following in the footsteps of the world, the Church as a whole has placed her attention upon programs and methods and ideas and schemes and plans designed with one goal in mind. Get people excited! Keep them entertained. Keep a bored Church excited, a church in which, for the most part, the things of God and His Word have become unexciting and uninteresting and bland and inconsequential to daily life.

The Holy Spirit has not been enough for us. Meeting together around the Word of God has become a monotonous, even a laborious chore. We don't really believe. We aren't really convinced that when we meet together in Jesus' name, He is there. If He is not there, if He is not with us when we meet together, we have one of two choices to make.

First, we can do the right thing. We can disband, go home, and name our sin for what it is--coldness, apathy for the things of God--and beg Him to restore unto us the joy of our salvation and the intensity of our hunger and thirst after Himself. We can call upon Him to revive us again. No, that isn't personal enough. Revival is always personal. Revival is one time we are to be self-centered. It is not "they"...not "he" or "she" that need revival. It's I. I need revival. We cry to the Lord, revive me again. Each one of us cries out to a righteous, holy God on a personal basis. "Revive me, O God!

That is the first choice we have available to us in the face of a bored, disinterested, lethargic Church. Sadly, the alternative choice is the one we have seen the Church take in recent decades. That is the choice of carnal, human stimulation--appeal to the flesh. Devise methods that will stimulate the flesh, that attract the crowds, that interest the masses, methods that everybody is excited by. Entertain. Bring things up into "the nineties!" Make the things of the Bible relevant to our lifestyles.

May I confess to you that I'm sick and tired of our never-ending concern about whether or not something in God's Word is "relevant" to us in our day. Let me tell you, dear people, it's all relevant! God doesn't need our ideas and approaches, full of the flesh, on how we're going to make the things of God come across as "relevant" and appealing, ways to show how much God "fits into our culture."

We bring our culture to God and we say, "OK, God. We're going to fit you into our mold...our way."

It is therefore blasphemy! It is error of the worst sort, totally contrary to God's Word. The Word of God nowhere tells us to attempt to adjust His truth to fit into this world system. No! Just the opposite! We are told in Holy Writ to refrain from emulating the world. We are told that we are a special, unique people, a people who stick out, a peculiar people. We are told not to blend into this wicked world system.

We see this constant tendency in the Church, this continuing bent toward blending with the world. Who just a few short decades ago, would have thought that we would have come to this day of "Christian" comedians, "Christian" entertainers, "Christian" celebrities, "Christian" performing artists, "Christian" disc jockeys?

This has come about because of a Church that has lost her high regard for the One who is high above all else, a Church that has grown cold and indifferent toward the "great and dreadful God" that Daniel addresses in our text, a Church that in her falling away from intimacy with her blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, has lost the excitement of her first love, the excitement of her "Groom," if you please. She has finally thrown up her hands in defeat and has actually appealed to the world for excitement, for some way to resuscitate herself back to life. This is exactly what has happened.

We the Church have tried it God's way and it doesn't work! Therefore, we're going to do it the world's way.

The Church in this hour has chosen to ignore the exhortation of the Word of God to "be not conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2). The Church has elected to disregard Paul's solemn admonition to refrain from any conformity with this age, to "be not conformed to this age." The Lord Himself said, "Learn not the way of the heathen" (Jeremiah 10:2).

We've come to a day when short little talks are in, movies are in, plays are in, ice cream socials are in...fun is in...and precious-to-the-soul in-depth preaching of God's Holy Word is out. A weak, insipid, lukewarm Church, as the Lord's people of Jeremiah's day once did, cries out, "Don't make me think! Don't try to make me muse!...think! Do the opposite! Amuse me...Keep me from thinking!"

A. W. Tozer said, "The average professed Christian lives a life so worldly and careless that it is difficult to distinguish him from the unconverted man" (Paths To Power, page 25). The words of a twentieth century prophet to be sure. They aren't popular words, but they're true.

R. C. Sproul's comments are very similar. In a lecture he delivered a few years ago he said: "Most Christians according to the Gallup Polls seen recently, live according to cultural, social conventions and not according to the Law of God. Percentage-wise just as many evangelicals are having abortions as secular people.... You can't tell the difference between a pagan and a Christian in our culture because the dominant basis of our morality is not coming from thoughtful meditation of the Law of God, but it is coming from what is acceptable in our environment...what the 'herd' is doing."

The language that is used is much the same as that of a by-gone era in the Church. We still hear the right terms used, the right clichés, the right-sounding kind of talk. But it's all lacking in reality, in the sincerity of spirit, in the seriousness of approach to the things of Heaven. There is in the meeting an obvious pursuit of something that manifests itself as emanating from the flesh. It is the pursuit of self-gratification. It is the seeking of a substitute for true spirituality, true worship, true godliness in the Church, a substitute for the pursuit of God!

Note how Daniel addresses his Lord, "O Lord, the great and dreadful God!" What an appropriate, respectful title to give to the Lord. "Dreadful" means to fear greatly. Nine out of ten, Christians would say that the fear of God means "reverential awe." And they would be correct. To fear God is to stand before Him with an overwhelming sense of awe.

The fear of the Lord was a reality to Daniel and he was dumbstruck by His might and by His power, by His very Person. But I would also submit to you that the "fear of God" also meant to Daniel that he feared God; he was simply afraid of God, of the great and dreadful God.

The idea is prevalent in the unregenerate world today, and sad to say, in much of the contemporary Church in this hour, that God is simply and only a God of love and He would never do anything to hurt us and we shouldn't be afraid of God. This is a lie cunningly devised in the mind of the father of lies to mislead simple-minded and ignorant men. A God of love only Who can never be a God of wrath is a God of a "cunningly devised fable" (1 Peter 1:16).

To not fear God is by God's own words "an evil thing." To His own backsliding people He said, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou has forsaken the Lord thy God, and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts" (Jeremiah 2:19). An alternate rendering of the term "my fear" as given in the margin is "the dread of Me." To not dread the Lord God Jehovah, to not be afraid of God is an evil thing.

To His own people the Lord said, "Be astonished...be horribly afraid" (Isaiah 2:12). In his glorious vision of God in Revelation John said, "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man" (Revelation 1:17). Do you know what that is? I heard a preacher once call it what it really is--holy fright!

Making Confession

In Daniel 9:4 Daniel said: "And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession." Daniel is praying to God here toward the end of the Babylonian Captivity. The captivity of the Jews was God's punishment to them for having grievously sinned against Him (Lamentations 1:18). Daniel knew from reading the Scriptures at that time that freedom was fast approaching. He prayed this prayer about 539 BC and the Captivity was going to end about 536 or 535 BC. Therefore the entire prayer is a confession of sin by Daniel on behalf of his people and himself.

It is a necessary thing for the child of God always to confess his sin when approaching the Throne if he would have God's ear and see His face. It is needful when going to prayer to always begin with confession of sin. Isaiah said, "Your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). The Psalmist said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18). If we, as Daniel, seek His face, sin must be dealt with. It must be confessed as did Daniel. Otherwise, God says He will hide His face and will not hear.

We need to see the glory of a life of confession--habitually admitting to God every misdeed, every shortcoming, every slightest evil thought, every occasion of a fiery tongue that would inflict injury or suffering on another, a tongue that lies. Confess our pursuit of other "things" in this world, confess our frequent coldness toward a loving God, our disinterest in the things of God, our glaring absence of a hunger and thirst after Him. Own up to our lukewarmness toward the things of God.

Don't ever think that dealing with sin is negative. That is one of the most positive things a Christian can do. According to God's Word, sincere confession is the door to joy and happiness in the Lord. True confession always brings forgiveness and restoration and joy. "Blessed [that is, happy] is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Psalm 32:1). "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

A number of years ago I heard this truth stated by a born-again Jewish preacher. He said, "Salvation is just the beginning of a life of repentance!" How true! How glorious!

"Nothing between my soul and the
Saviour....

Keep the way clear! Let nothing between."