

February 16

"They serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." — Daniel 3:12.

The refusal of these three young men was as trying as it was noble. The resolution has immortalized them. Let us observe how much they had to overcome in adhering to it.

They could plead authority. Here was the command of their sovereign, and good men are to be good subjects. They honour principalities and powers, they obey magistrates, and are ready to every good work. But there is a difference between civil and spiritual claims. We are, indeed, to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, but we must also render unto God the things that are God's. If any being requires us to do what is opposed to the revealed will of God, we are prevented by an authority from which there can lie no appeal; and we ought to obey God rather than man. Thus the midwives did not as the King of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men-children alive: "And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses."

This conscientiousness, however, has often given the conduct of God's servants an appearance of insubordination and revolt, and their enemies have not failed to seize it, and turn it to their discredit. Jesus was not Cæsar's friend, and stirred up the people. The Apostles turned the world upside down. And, doubtless, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were censured and vilified for their disloyalty.

They could plead obligation, Nebuchadnezzar was not only their sovereign, but their friend and benefactor. He had educated them in a princely manner, and advanced them to the most honourable charges. And nothing tries like tenderness. Benefits attract and attach them, and good men are the most susceptible of grateful impressions. One of the most painful things in the world to an ingenuous mind, is to refuse the wishes of one who has done much for him, for there is nothing in which he would more delight, were he not restrained by principle. Suppose a dutiful child. He loves and honours his parents, and he ought to honour them. Those parents, in other respects, are kind and good but they are worldly, and require him to go into the dissipations of life; they are irreligious, and forbid him to attend what according to his conviction, is the truth of God, and, instead of threatening, they weep over him, and beseech him, by every tender motive, not to break their hearts, nor bring down their gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Now, to loosen from such embraces and entreaties and act a part that looks like disrespect, at the hearing of a voice that cries, "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me," here is a trial hardly supportable. And much of this, these young men would feel, at the thought of the favours which had been heaped upon them.

They could plead universality of compliance. All besides obey, and why should they stand alone, and affect to be better than every one else? How often is this objection thrown out? Singularity, for its own sake, argues a little and a vain mind: vain, because it seeks notice; and little, because it can attain it in no better way. In things harmless and indifferent, we may lawfully conform to the usages of the day and place wherein we live; but where truth, and duty, and conscience are concerned, we must be steadfast and immovable, though deserted, opposed, ridiculed by all, and by unsought, but indispensable singularity, evince the purity of our motives, and the dignity of our principles. So did Abdiel: ".....Faithful found

Among the faithless, faithful he
Among innumerable false, unmov'd,
Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified;
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal.
Nor number, nor example, with him wrought
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,
Though single."

So did Joshua, and Caleb, and Lot, and Noah. And all Christians are required not to be conformed to the world. And Jesus died to redeem and purify unto himself a peculiar people, and peculiar they must be while the multitude do evil. Well, said these sufferers, if all yield, we must not, we will not, whatever be the consequence.

And they could plead the dreadfulness of the penalty. We are often ready to justify or excuse our conduct by the pressure of circumstances, and to allege that the trial is too great for our virtue. And what is the trial? What are our difficulties and perils in the path of duty? If we follow such a course — well, shall we be bound to the stake, or thrown into a den of lions, or a fiery furnace? No. Shall we then be deprived of our liberty, and confined in a prison, or be stripped of our property, and reduced to beggary? No such thing — blessed be the laws of this happy land. Behold our jeopardies and sacrifices! We may lose a trifle of our profit by not selling or working on the Sabbath. We may have less to hoard by giving alms to the needy. If we follow our convictions, we may lose the smile of a friend, or incur the sneer of a companion. By the redeeming our time, we may even be constrained to leave the bed of sloth a little earlier in the morning. These are our tribulations because of the Word! These are the martyrs of our day! Ye professors of religion, who can exercise no self-denial, who can take up no cross, "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, where thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" Look at these youths. What had they to lose; what to suffer? A fiery

furnace before their eyes, into which they were to be instantly thrown!

Morning Exercises For Everyday In The Year
By Rev. William Jay