

Uncompromising

By John MacArthur

John MacArthur:

You know uh, the very nature of this uh chapel, the warmth, and the humor, the sensitivity, the feeling of real life, speaks of Dr. O'Neill. There's some people that you couldn't get away with this in honoring them, because they're stuffy, or whatever. But uh, this says a lot about the warmth of this man. I uh, remember my first day in seminary. We were over in Sutherland Hall in those days, none of this was-was even here. And uh, I could come here also and park and not get a ticket.

[Audience laughs]

John MacArthur:

But anyway uh. But I remember the first day of class, Dr. Feinberg was teaching um Old Testament introduction, and uh some student asked a question. And he replied by saying, "Your questions have to be more intelligent than that or there's really no sense in asking them."

[Audience laughs]

John MacArthur:

I never forgot that, and I never asked a question the rest-the rest of the semester.

[John MacArthur and audience laugh]

John MacArthur:

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And uh, that was my first introduction to seminary. I thought it was so serious and so intimidating. And then I went to Dr. O'Neill's class on speech, and a guy was selling rolls of toilet paper. Do you remember that? Glenn Pettitt selling rolls of toilet paper? And I really had difficulty trying to find out where the balance in seminary really was.

[John MacArthur and audience laugh]

John MacArthur:

But there was always that sense of life, and uh vitality, and warmth. I remember my first real fellowship with Dr. O'Neill was when we pitched for opposing softball teams uh at the seminary picnic, and things like that. Those were great times. And I remember one student in preaching class, I'll never forget as long as I live, in the midst of trying to deliver a sermon, which was just really impossible for him we had discovered.

[Audience laughs]

John MacArthur:

Um, stopped in the middle of his sermon, and said, "I think I finally understand my problem. I can't talk and think at the same time."

[John MacArthur and audience laugh]

John MacArthur:

So we suggested to him that he should be a writer.

[Audience laughs]

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John MacArthur:

I have great memories of uh, trying to learn how to preach under Dr. O'Neill's tutelage and uh, after two years of effort speech class, and first uh work through of expository preaching, I preached when--in those days you had to preach your junior and your senior year, there weren't any options. Everybody preached in chapel and you preached there twice. And the first time I preached, I was so excited, he assigned me Second Samuel seven. Probably some of you are still getting Second Samuel seven. And um, I preached on that chapter, and I really thought it was-it was okay. And uh Dr. Feinberg didn't even make any comments, do you-do you still have those long sheets? Well, he didn't even make a comment. All he did with a red pen was write over the whole sheet, "You missed the entire point of the passage." Bang! And he handed me the sheet.

[Audience laughs and sighs sympathetically]

John MacArthur:

And I thought that was very direct.

[Audience laughs]

John MacArthur:

That was a very great lesson for me, I want you to know that. I-I-since then, I do struggle to get the point of the passage.

[Audience laughs]

John MacArthur:

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But I-I want to say a very personal word of thanks, Dr. O'Neill, for your tremendous patience with me. And we were a rare class. Uh, I suppose they're all unique. But we were a rare bunch in those days. And I remember the greatest pain of my life was when I was taking speech class, and uh, there was a guy in the class who stuttered just very badly. And, you know, you'd say, "If you got 15 minutes, I'd like to have a five minute conversation with," you know, he just had a he was a dear guy and we all loved him to death. And when he got a higher grade than I did in speech, I knew I was in trouble from the beginning.

[Audience laughs]

John MacArthur:

But uh, that was also a good lesson. But the Lord really has blessed my heart and my life, because of, not only the teaching of Dr. O'Neil, but his friendship, and uh just the fellowship that we've enjoyed even in recent years in the establishing of the extension out in our church property. We have had occasion to meet now and then. And that's been a, that's been a tremendous heart fulfillment for me to be able to see the seminary extend itself out there so that men in our area and further west can be a part of the, of the process of education. And I thank God for that. When I was wanting to think about how to look at the Word of God in the light of what Dr. O'Neil means to us, I was drawn to Daniel, chapter one, and I'd like to invite you, if you will, to just turn to that in your Bible. I think of uh, Daniel obviously as the model of no compromise, the man who was unwilling to adjust his absolutes, unwilling to alter his commitment to the integrity of the Word of God, no matter what the pressure was. And I know that in the theological world, there is a tremendous amount of pressure to do that.

I recently spoke at another seminary, and I was asked to give my evaluation of that seminary to the student body leaders, the faculty, the administration, and the board of trustees. And I-I gave them that evaluation. And one of the professors stood up and said, "If you're telling me that I have to identify with evangelicals and fundamentalists in order to gain acceptance in the evangelical community, I'm not willing to do that." I thought that was a pretty telling thing. He had succumbed somehow to the pressure of the academic eastern elite, or the dead Germans that nobody would know existed if they didn't make heroes out of them. Somehow or other, he had somehow managed to compromise himself in the process and was in rather a rapid uh, pace, jettisoning some of the key things that we want to hold onto. So I'm thankful to God for a seminary where there is no compromised perspective as it relates to the integrity of the Word of God. And that-for that, I thank and praise God, that uh Dr. O'Neill has been the kind of man who's maintained that kind of thing against the kinds of pressures that I think are brought to bear in the world in which we live.

And I think that Daniel faced something of the same thing in the first chapter of Daniel, of course, you know, he was taken to Babylon in the first phase of uh the captivity. And in verse three, the text says, "The King spoke to Ashpenaz, the master of his Eunuch's, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel and of the king's seed and of the princes, youths in whom was no blemish but well-favored, skillful in all wisdom, gifted in knowledge, understanding, science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the King's Palace and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans." In other words, the-the idea was that if you're going to take the populace captive, you better get the cream of the crop and brainwash them so they can control the people. And that's really probably what they had in mind. The king

appointed them a daily provision of the king's food, the wine which he drank, nourishing them three years, that at the end of them they might stand before the king. And among them were the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Michail, and Azariah. And they changed their names, you know, to Belthazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and so forth. Abednego.

What you have here is basically an effort being made by the Babylonians to sort of turn these people into Chaldeans. To brainwash them, and they took three approaches to them. They wanted to change their belief, and that happens through education, at least in their mind. They wanted to teach them the-the learning or the languages of the Chaldeans. Secondly, they want to change their titles. They wanted to give them new names so that they would have a sense of new identity, and then they wanted to change their lifestyle. And so they were under a very heavy pressure to conform to another kind of society. But it was in the midst of that that we meet, of course, Daniel, in verse eight, and it says, "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself," and so forth. So here was a man who was an uncompromising person. Who stood against the trend, against the pressure, who would not allow the educational process, uh, the titles, the whole lifestyle thing, the bribes, the glories of the king's palace, the potential for ambition to take over their hearts and minds to affect him. He was solidly committed and uncompromising in terms of the things of the Lord.

And I think this is a parallel to the kind of man that Dr. O'Neill has been, and the kind of man that the cause of Jesus Christ, particularly in the seminary environment, demands. Because there is tremendous pressure to compromise. We live in a pedantic, egotistical sort of anti-authority, self-styled liberal, theological world in many ways. And the heat is on. And I thank God for an

uncompromising seminary and an uncompromising leader. I-I've seen many schools fall. I've seen many leaders fall to the Chaldean education, the Chaldean titles, quote unquote, and the Chaldean lifestyle. And I-I bless God that that has not happened here because of the faithfulness of Dr. O'Neill. Let me just take you a little bit into the chapter and see if I can't point out some of the things that I think mark an uncompromising man. And you can draw the connections in your own mind to his life and to yours as well.

The first thing that I see about Daniel here that marks him as an uncompromising man is that he had an unashamed boldness. He had an unashamed boldness. I love what happens in verse 80, "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself." He made a vow with his own conscience that he would in no sense sacrifice his commitment to the Word of God, the integrity of the Word of God. He would not bow to any kind of pressure. And what's important about that, is that he says to the guy who's in charge, at the end of verse eight after he has vowed that he wouldn't take the king's food or the king's wine, he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. And what I see in that is really holy courage. He could have tiptoed around the issue and said he had hypoglycemia, or whatever, and uh, and said, you know, I just really can't get into that. That's not my kind of thing. I've never eaten those. When I was a little kid, I had a problem, my father tried to make me eat that stuff, and now since then, I have a psychological aversion of that or whatever.

But the point here was I think he was very upfront. I think he simply said this stuff is unacceptable to me. It will defile my conscience. It will defile--He may have given them a whole long deal on the old covenant dietary laws for all we know. But there was no equivocating as to

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the reason, you see. That's the kind of uncompromising holy courage that you like to see in a man. Who doesn't skirt an issue, who doesn't give people other than the real answer or the real issue. But who is upfront, and honest, and bold. Jeremiah called that "being valiant for the truth." And I think it was Ezekiel who said it was "setting the face like flint." And in First Chronicles 12:8, the text says that, "the face was set like a lion." It's that-that holy boldness that says "This is what I believe. And this is where I stand. And I not only won't compromise it, but I won't hold back telling you where my non-compromising position is." And there's real integrity in that. There are some people who don't compromise, but they aren't willing to give the real reason why. He just flat out says it'll defile me. It's unacceptable to me.

There's a second thing that I think marks Daniel as an uncompromising man. And I suppose we can generalize things from the life of Daniel and see them--

[Audio cuts out]

John MacArthur:

--enter, not only an unashamed boldness, but an uncommon standard. In verse eight, it says he would not eat the portion of the king's food and he would not drink the wine. If you go down to verse twelve, he says in that verse that he's going to drink nothing but water, and he takes the vow of total abstinence at this point. Now, I don't think necessarily that was a binding vow in the old covenant. I think it's pretty clear that it wasn't. I mean, there were drink offerings that were brought in acts of holy worship. But I think there's something essential here, and that is that people who are really uncompromising people, people who sort of set the pace, people who lead the parade, tend to have a standard that's higher than the common. They tend to take a cut above

the norm. Daniel not only rejected the king's wine, but he rejected all wine. I'm sure he wanted to make himself utterly distinct from the drunkards and the gluttons of Babylon, but it just seems to me that his life was just a shade above everybody else. He just chose to live at that kind of level.

Maybe uh, kind of like the Nasserite vow. You didn't have to do that, but there were some people who just set themselves to live above the norm. There's something to be said for that. And that's the kind of man who is an uncompromising man. I think there's a third thing here that's-that's also important as you look at the marks of an uncompromising life. And that is an unearthly protection. An unearthly protection. I love what it says in verse nine, "Now, God had brought Daniel into favor and compassion with the prince of the Eunuchs." In other words, there's a great truth there. You see, you don't have to compromise to be secure, because that's in God's hands. You don't have to compromise, you see, to gain a certain effect with men, because God controls men. So as soon as you say, "Well, I've got to compromise over here, because if I don't compromise here, then such and such is going to happen with these folks over here." Have you've forgotten the fact that God can turn people's hearts, and God controls people's minds if He so sovereignly chooses? It is, of course, axiomatic that if you have great convictions and you're a man of great integrity, people are going to respect that. But that isn't the reason he was in favor with this, this prince of the Eunuchs Ashpenaz, that's not the reason. The reason is because God brought him into favor. And that's a marvelous thought.

If you go through life, whether you're administrating a seminary, or whether you're pastoring a church, or teaching, or on a mission field, whatever it is, and you think that you've got to compromise to gain your ends with men, you've forgotten who controls men. God controls men,

and all you want to do is make sure you live an uncompromising life before God, and God will take care of the results. And that is a tremendous confidence. I can't help but think of Joseph, who also was an uncompromising man, and because of his uncompromising heart, God controlled a whole nation in his behalf. And that's how it ought to be. Daniel was not rebellious. He was not antagonistic. He was not cantankerous. He was resolute. He was committed in verse 10, the prince of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear, my lord, the king who hath appointed your food and your drink. Why should he see your face worse looking than the youths who are of your age?" In other words, if you don't take his food, and you don't drink his drink, you know, he's gonna come and check you guys out. And, you know, this is sort of like a process of developing you. And if he sees you inferior to the rest, then you shall make me endanger my head with the king.

And so the man is concerned about his own head. But Daniel is confident that God's on his side. It's a great thing. Don't ever compromise for the sake of man. God controls men. There's a fourth principle that I see here in terms of an uncompromising character, and that is an unhindered persistence. It seems as though he sort of hit uh, a loggerhead with uh Ashpenaz. And so in verse 11, Daniel said to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Michail, and Azariah. Just an interesting thought there. He takes his case to another court. He approaches another fella. He is undaunted. And again, this is the kind of thing that I think uh, the real stuff of an uncompromising heart is made out of. You're always going to run into problems. You always going to have resistance. And some people can say, well, I'm going to stand my ground, and they hit the first test, and maybe they get by that. And after it comes to be very difficult, they sort of give in. Well, not Daniel. If he couldn't get what he wanted with guy

number one, he just hit guy number two. He-he kept his absolutes, and he persisted in maintaining those absolutes.

I fear that some people may be uncompromising only till they hit resistance. And then in an exercise of convenience, they'll abandon their supposed principles. But not Daniel. He had an unhindered persistence. Well, you can see them there. They're obvious. Unashamed boldness, an uncommon standard, and unearthly protection, and unhindered persistence. Let me give you a few more, just to fill up your homiletic file. Verses twelve and thirteen sort of, I think, we could call an unblemished faith. In verse 12, "Test thy servants, I beseech thee. 10 days, let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our countenance, or our faces, be looked upon before thee and the faces of the youths that eat of the portion of the king's food. And as thou seeist, deal with thy servants." In other words, he says, we'll-we'll put our life on the line. We'll take the test. We know God's given us a standard. We're going to live by that standard, or we're gonna believe that in the end we're gonna come out ahead by being obedient to God. That's faith. A sense of almost being invincible.

And I think that's legitimate. I think when we function on the basis of the Word of God, there is a certain invincibility. And that, again, is the essence of an uncompromising heart, that you-you're not afraid of anything. You see, the pure in heart have nothing to fear. Right? Because God is on their side. And therefore, you can have unblemished faith. Sin always brings doubt. When men ask me what the key to the ministry is, I always basically answer the same thing. The key to the ministry is purity, purity of life, virtue of life, holiness. It's-the real struggle of my life is not to think of good sermons, the real struggle of my life is to maintain the killing of the deeds of the

body. Romans 8:12 and 13. It is to be on the victory side of the battle over sin, because a holy weapon is a, is an awesome thing in God's hand, isn't it? And there's a sense of invincibility, I don't have the fear. I don't have to fear what might happen when I-when I walk in obedience to God's will, because I know I'm in that place of-of blessing. And I think that's where Daniel was, because he had an uncompromising heart, he had an unblemished faith. There was nothing that could mar that faith. There was nothing that could disrupt that faith. And then faith will always be tested.

And so there's another thought here, that is an unusual test. All commitments are tested, all of them. And we find that, as he offers himself for the test, verse 14 says, so he consented to-to to them in this matter and tested them ten days. And at the end of the ten days, their countenances appeared fairer, and fatter in flesh than all the youths who did eat the portion of the king's food. You knew that would happen. Thus, Melzar took away the portion of their food and the wine that they should drink, and gave them vegetables. And water, we can assume. All commitments are tested, all commitments will be tested. And they were tested and they won the battle. So if you take an uncompromising stand, it'll be tested. And you'll be victorious if you've been faithful to the Word of God. Just a couple more that sort of wrap this passage up in a marvelous way. Look at verse seventeen, "As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge, and skill in all learning and wisdom. I want to stop there for just a moment.

There were four young men here. Now we extol the virtue of Daniel, and of course Daniel is the leader here. But all of them were uncompromising, weren't they? But I think there's something to be said for the fact that they were all uncompromising, because they had a leader who was

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uncompromising. You know, we really need those kind of models. Last week in our church, we had a seminar on expository preaching, and we had pastors come from all over the country. We had a great time. And uh we just taught them about expository preaching. And it was really kind of interesting, because as the week went on about the--or-one-one day I was lecturing, and I think it was on Wednesday, and then all day Thursday. But about halfway through Wednesday, we were talking about expository preaching. And this one guy put his hand up and he said, "Just a minute." He said, "You're giving us all these principles, and all this stuff. Let me ask you this question. Who are your favorite preachers? Who do you listen to when you want to hear a good sermon? Who reaches you, who touches your heart?" And so I suggested maybe some some people that I'd heard preach that had had a profound effect on me.

And then they started naming all the preachers they could think of and asked me what I thought of them. And I said, wait a minute, I'm not here to evaluate people, you know? I mean, I don't even evaluate myself, First Corinthians 4, I've got to wait till I get to heaven to see what's gonna happen. I tend to be biased in my own favor.

[Audience laughs]

John MacArthur:

So I'm not objective. And I certainly don't want to make myself the standard. But I--so I just sort of pushed it off. And then as I thought about it that night, I came back the next day, and I said, I just realized something. That all of the principles of preaching really cannot be understood unless they're fleshed out in somebody's life. And trying to deal with all these abstractions is very difficult. People ultimately in need patterns. They need models. They need examples. That's why

Paul said, "Be followers of me as I am of Christ." That's why he said to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, "You know the way I've done things, that's the way you should do them. You know how we were among you." And uh, and I think that the-the great reality in this text is that when you have an uncompromising leader, you're going to have some uncompromising products. We're following that. And that's why I say I thank God for Dr. O'Neill, for a standard, and for others on this faculty, and others in the kingdom of God, who are uncompromising because they will tend to produce that. Because they set a pace, they set a standard, as Daniel did.

Well, we've talked about an unashamed boldness, an uncommon standard, an unearthly protection, an unhindered persistence, an unblemished faith, and then an unusual testing. Let's talk about two more things and just wrap up our thoughts. An uncompromising life in the case of Daniel was marked by an unmeasurable blessing. Verse seventeen, "As for these for youths, God gave them knowledge, skill in all learning, and wisdom." And Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. I want you to notice there that God gave them that. No matter what we attain in the ministry, no matter what we gain in the ministry, we have to understand the source. Right? It's always God. The best that you are cannot succeed in the kingdom of God. The cleverest wit, the most gifted communicator, cannot succeed in the advance of the Kingdom of God, apart from God. Right? I mean, that's patently obvious. That's basic. And so the credit goes to God. All our attainments are His. All our failures are ours. And if you don't ever uh, have any other clearer understanding of the ministry, that would be enough to give you perspective that you need.

The best of us cannot succeed, it is God. But I believe God blesses the uncompromising life. I think when you have integrity with the Word of God, He's going to bless that. That's why it's

been the commitment of my ministry, and I really believe that more than anything else, that was infused into me here, to never compromise the Word of God. If it says it, that's how it is. And you can't separate preaching it from implementing it. You can't say, well, we preach against that, we just don't do anything about it. You can't do that, or people will think preaching and living are two different things. And in many cases, they are, but they shouldn't be. And so God poured out tremendous blessing. Verse 18 says, "At the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before, Nebuchadnezzar. And the king conversed with them, and among them all was found none like Daniel Hananiah, Michail, and Azariah. Therefore, stood they before the King." When the three year period was up, or whatever it was, they stood there and they were picked out of the whole group.

And that's the blessing of God. If you live an uncompromising life, God will put you where He wants you, right where He wants you, because you'll be the kind of person who can take that situation and make the most of it, "In all matters of wisdom," verse 20 says, "and understanding that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm." And that's probably an underestimate. That's just one way to articulate the difference between functioning on a human level and functioning with the energy of God. The unmeasurable blessing of an uncompromising life. And then a last, if I can extrapolate off of verse 21, "And Daniel continued even unto the first year of King Cyrus." He continued all the way into the next empire, didn't he? I like to think of that as an unlimited influence, an unlimited influence. An uncompro-uncompromising life has those ripples that go on and on and on. Those are the people that make a mark on history with their character and the effect of their ministry.

I thank God for Dr. O'Neill because I believe that influence will go on. It's going on in my life. The influence that he had in teaching me to preach, it's going on in the lives of the young men that, that I have the privilege of teaching and working with. It goes on in the life of the people in the church who are receiving from me. It goes on with other pastors that we try to help to understand expository preaching. His life goes on, if in my life, in hundreds and hundreds of others, even beyond what we can understand. Every Sunday at West Point, when the cadets go into a chu-into the chapel service, they recite a prayer. I don't know if you've ever heard the West Point Chapel prayer, but I think it's interesting and I'd like to close with it, listen to it. "Make us choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, and never be content with half-truth when whole truth can be won. Endow us with courage that is born of loyalty to all that is noble and worthy, that scorns to compromise with vice and injustice, and knows no fear when right and truth are in jeopardy." That's great, isn't it?

And I ask you a simple question. If they can do that for the love of country, what can we do for the love of Christ? Certainly an uncompromising life. Let me just say in parting that I count this a great privilege to have had the honor of sharing in this wonderful occasion. The privilege is mine. God bless you.

Speaker 2:

Father, we are indeed grateful for the opportunity that You have given us together this morning to honor Dr. O'Neill and his wife, Phoebe. We thank you for the message, Father, as well. We thank You for Dr. O'Neill's uncompromising stand, his boldness, Father, his high standards, his

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yielded life to You, his persistence, his faith, his skill in the modeling life that he presents. We thank You, Father, for the blessing that he has been to us as students and to Talbot. We thank You, Father, for his influence in the life of this student body and this institution. We pray that You'd continue to grant to him Your mercy, Lord that You would indeed use him further in the life of Talbot. Father, grant us increase through his ministry to us. We give these things to You in Your-in Your Son's name, Father. Amen.