

Daniel: Choosing to Stand Alone

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We know more of the personal history and the private life of Daniel than we do of any of the other prophets. He is introduced to us as a teenage boy, probably 15 to 17 years of age, when he was carried away as a captive and transplanted from his home in Israel to a foreign country, a heathen land. For over sixty years he lived in that dissolute court and pagan environment into which he'd been taken with all of its spiritually deadening influences.

He walked with royalty, and he did so with dignity and with purpose amidst a licentious and rakish court and society of that day. He became prime minister of two world governments, that of Babylon and that of Media-Persia. He was lifted to the very highest position that any king could offer any man.

Daniel was more famous and more respected in his day than the Prime Minister of England or the Secretary of State of the United States. He was much more famous than any of the men who have served in those offices. He won the friendship of kings, but he also had bitter and cruel enemies who sought his life.

He was loyal and true to the pagan prince whom he served. This is one of the things that characterized this man. He maintained an unblemished testimony. He kept himself unspotted from the world. He walked so that no one, not even his enemies, could find any fault with him – that is, anything they could prove. They brought many charges, but they never were able to make anything stick against this man.

In the sixth chapter of the Book of Daniel we read:

Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.
(Daniel 6:4)

May I say that this is a marvelous testimony for a man like Daniel to have in a foreign and very wicked court of that day. He was faithful to God. He was an old man when a testimony came from heaven by the mouth of an angel, "O Daniel, a man greatly beloved." What a testimony when you have reached a ripe old age, not to have men down here praise you, but to have a testimony come from heaven, "A man greatly beloved!" That was God's testimony. And the writer to the Hebrews put him in the Westminster Hall of Fame and Faith, but not by name. It wasn't necessary to name Daniel, because it's well known who the writer is speaking about when he says in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions. (Hebrews 11:33)

What a testimony for Daniel to have!

Then when we come to the end of this man's life, we find in the very last verse of the Book of Daniel this statement concerning him, "...Thou shalt rest" (Daniel 12:13). Having served God and man so faithfully, now God says in effect, "You will now go to your rest." And not only that, He adds, "You'll stand in your lot at the end of the days. When the time comes for the resurrection of your people, you will be raised with them. And then you'll receive the just reward for the life that you have lived for God." I cannot conceive of any man whose life stands out like the life of Daniel.

Somebody asks the question, "What is the secret of this man's life?" In our day when success is the mark of greatness, it doesn't make any difference what enterprise you are in – you

may be a gambler, you may be in the race-horse business – but if you make a success of it, the world will give you a passing grade and say that you are all right. Today we have gone overboard on this matter of success. May I say to you that Daniel was a success, not only by God's standards, but by the world's standards.

We can turn back a few pages in our Bibles to the Book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a howling failure according to the world's standards. God called him to stand in a dark and hard place. But this man Daniel didn't stand in that kind of a place. Rather, he served in the glow and publicity of a great court, and he stood yonder at the very top. May I say to you, our leading periodicals would have sent their editors to get an article on Daniel and his success, because that's the way the world measures things today.

Now what was the secret of his success? What was the key to his life? If you should ask me, I think that I would express it in one word, only one word: separation. Here is a man separated to God. And I believe that separation is still the door to the understanding of prophecy. One of the reasons that prophecy has fallen on evil days, and the reason it has lent itself to fanaticism, and the reason that a great many people have turned from it is because of the lifestyle of those who proclaim it. If there is anything in the Word of God that is made clear, it is that prophecy, in order to be a blessing to our own hearts and lives, must lead to a separated life.

I want to give you a statement of G. H. Lang, a great expositor of the Word of God in years gone by:

The qualification for being a prophet is the qualification for understanding prophecy. The reader must be one with the prophet in this at least, the resolute purpose to be holy. For the immediate end of all prophecy is practical, moral: "Every one that hath this hope set on Christ purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). Merely mental study of Scripture is idle, being idle, is mischievous, "if any man intendeth to do God's will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God" (John 7:17). Therefore, as we proceed to consider the visions and messages of Daniel, let each ask himself, *Am I a man of Daniel's moral purpose and resolve?* If so, the Spirit of truth will open the meaning of what He showed and said to Daniel; if not, Daniel's book will remain to me a sealed book, even when "the time of the end" may have come (Daniel 12:9).

May I say to you, that is the one great requirement today for the study of prophecy. And the reason today it has dropped into so much fanaticism is because teachers and preachers of prophecy have ignored the fact that the one prerequisite is a life that is dedicated to Almighty God. Now that's the thing that characterized Daniel: separation.

Now I know that the word separation is in disrepute. And it has been harmed today more in the house of its friends than from the outside. Right now we have two extreme groups in our midst. In one group are extreme separationists. They're legalists, actually. They have adopted a narrow and limited code of conduct. They have reduced the Christian life to their little straitjacket, and if you don't get in it, it's going to be bad for you. They say that we've been delivered from the Ten Commandments and from the Mosaic Law in order that we can get under their law. And they haven't settled for *ten* commandments – some of them have made a hundred! And if you don't follow them, you are not going to make it. They are our present-day Pharisees, and they have adopted the policy of "touch not, taste not, handle not." Many of these are unkind and cruel in their conduct and in their judgment on others. And they happen to be the greatest gossips you can meet in these days. As the young people say, they'll chop you to pieces if you're

not very careful. May I say to you, that's legalism. It certainly does not manifest the spirit of our Lord, and it certainly is not New Testament separation.

Then, my beloved, there is another group that goes to the opposite extreme. These folk are anti-legalists. They follow, actually, one of the early heresies of the church called "Antinomianism." That is, they believe that since we're saved by grace, we do as we please. They like the principle of grace, but they do not like the precepts of grace. There's no discipline of grace, according to them, and one's conduct does not count. You may live however you please. Paul, in Romans 6: 12, answered them, "Shall we continue in sin...? God forbid." Those who have been saved and yet continue to sin are spiritual rebels today. They don't follow any man or anything. They do as they please.

May I say that both of these views have hurt the concept of Bible separation.

Let's look now at the separation in Daniel's life. I believe that in the Book of Daniel we have true separation, certainly Bible separation. And if you can sing casually, "Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone," then it might be well for you to understand what is implied, what it means to dare to be a Daniel, what it means to stand alone for God in our day.

Notice now this man's separation. Daniel was young when he was carried away as a captive to Babylon. When Nebuchadnezzar first captured Jerusalem in 606 B.C., he had no notion of actually destroying the city. He could have, but it was not until eighteen years later that he destroyed Jerusalem. In the meantime there had been two rebellions against him that led him to this extreme action. At his first invasion, Nebuchadnezzar deposed the king and set his brother upon the throne of Jerusalem. Also he took into captivity at that time the choicest young men, those who had the highest IQs. The devil has always gone after the best. And I'm personally jealous, wanting the Lord to have the best. I don't see why we can't have more Christian workers with high IQs. What's wrong with dedicating *brains* to God occasionally? May I say to you, my beloved, we *need* them these days. And this man Nebuchadnezzar was wise enough to take the choicest, those with the highest mentality, those with the best personalities, those who were the most physically attractive; and among those were Daniel and his three companions. These four Hebrew children were the ones who went with the others into captivity at that time.

Now these four young men had been brought up under the Mosaic system. They had available to them a large part of the Old Testament Scripture, in fact, through the Book of Jeremiah. They found themselves in a foreign land with strange customs, pagan ways. They were homesick. If you want to know how they felt, the captives recorded their experience in Psalm 137:

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. (Psalm 137:1-6)

Well, there were other captives, I'm sorry to report, who did forget Jerusalem. Many of them never returned to their homeland.

But there was one young man who during his entire long life never forgot Jerusalem even when it meant endangering his life. On one occasion it meant being thrown into a den of lions

because he had opened his window and prayed toward Jerusalem as was his custom. He never forgot his God or his homeland. But as a teenager he was a homesick boy in a strange land.

Nebuchadnezzar's plan was to brainwash these young men to prepare them for service under his government. The idea was to take away from them everything that was in their background, put new ideas, new philosophy into their thinking, and make them servants of this great world government. He went so far as to change their names! We think of Daniel's three companions as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, but those are not their real names. The names their parents gave them are Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. We ought to remember those names rather than the heathen and pagan names given to them. The name Daniel, meaning "God is my judge," was changed to Belteshazzar, named after a heathen idol, Bel. Not only did Nebuchadnezzar actually change their names, he even changed their diet! You talk about changing a person, my friend, he intended to change them thoroughly!

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. (Daniel 1:8)

Now Daniel made a bold request. In fact, it was one that jeopardized his very life. For he happened to be in the court of a man who was suffering from a form of insanity, well-known today as a dangerous type of insanity. This man without a moment's notice could have given instruction to put these young upstarts to death for not wanting to eat what the king provided for them; after all, he was providing for them Babylon's best.

Now this passage here is the standard text for "Temperance Sunday." It's the stock in trade. I can remember as a boy being in Sunday school and having the teacher go over this again and again and again. May I say to you that there is more involved here than drinking. It has to do with eating also. "Be temperate in all things," the Scripture says.

Now what Daniel did was this: He respectfully requested for himself and his companions that they be put on a special diet. Daniel did not know the old saying, "When in Rome do as the Romans do." After all, Rome wasn't yet in existence. But he didn't even know it as "When in Babylon do as the Babylonians do." And I want to say something else for him, he didn't give a lecture on the evils of alcohol. He could have. Believe me, Babylon needed it. Neither did he make himself otherwise obnoxious. He just purposed in his heart that he would not eat that diet, that he would be true to God. That's all. Oh, how we need today men and women who will purpose in their hearts to be true to God! That's all.

God was with Daniel. Will you notice this,

Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. (Daniel 1:9)

That Daniel was a favorite of the one in charge was no accident. God was working in behalf of these young men through His providential dealings.

And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king. (Daniel 1:10)

You can see that this official of Nebuchadnezzar's really believed in that diet. He said in effect, "Now Daniel, I like you, and I'd love to cooperate with you. But suppose I permit you to go on this diet you want, and after three years the day comes when you are brought in before the king and you and your companions are there with the rest of the trainees – all fine looking fellows, because this is a great diet – and the four of you are little, old anemic things! You see what a position it would put me in! It would jeopardize my life! I can't do that."

So Daniel makes a fair request.

Then said Daniel to Melzar whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. (Daniel 1:11, 12)

It is a sensible, honest request. These young men are not juvenile delinquents who are rebelling against the law of the land. I want to make that very clear. They're not a gang from the east sides of New York City or Los Angeles. They simply respectfully request that the diet might be tested for ten days.

Now they asked for something that used to worry me a great deal. It was "pulse." Has that ever bothered you? Pulse to eat? Actually, the pulse to be eaten is some form of a cereal, it is a grain. If I may bring it up to date, Daniel says, "I want my Wheaties!" Cereal is what he is asking for.

Now the question arises, what was wrong with the meat in Babylon? Was it contaminated? Was there something wrong with the meat? May I say to you, I think they probably had the best filet mignon you could get anywhere in that day. There was nothing wrong with the meat in Babylon. We get our key to the problem in this statement: "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat," and then in his request to the prince of the eunuchs "that he might not defile himself." That's the key. This has to do with religious and ceremonial defilement. Remember that this young man had been brought up under the Mosaic system. He had been brought up to read the Word of God and to understand Scriptures like Psalm 119:9, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word." In effect, Daniel said, "I'm following the Word of God at any cost. This is not academic or forensic with me. This just happens to be reality with me, and I intend to follow the Word of God."

What was wrong with the meat, then? Well, several things. The first is that God had given to His people a line of demarcation between that which was clean and that which was unclean. Why? That men and women might know from the days of the Old Testament down to the present hour, and especially in this day of latitude and Arianism, that there is such a thing as black and white; such a thing as right and wrong; that there is such a thing as believing something, standing for something, and paying a price for your stand.

Now God had said to His people:

For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy [set apart]; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy. This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moveth in the waters, and of every creature that creepeth upon the earth: to make a difference between the unclean and the clean, and

between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten.
(Leviticus 11:44-47)

God said that there were certain meats that could be eaten and certain meats that could not be eaten. That was the Old Testament legalistic system. It had to do with religious ritual, for God had given it. That was true of that day, and He intended it to be followed to the very letter.

So Daniel said, "I can't eat the meat of Babylon. God forbids me to eat it." Oh, I have a notion that one day they would bring him stew. Gracious, all kinds of meat could be in the stew. I heard of a fellow who said, "I never eat stew away from home because I don't know what's in it, and," he continued, "I never eat it at home because I *do* know what's in it!" Daniel said, "I'll eat no meat. I don't eat this which is forbidden by God."

Now another issue is involved here. It was a live issue in Paul's day, and may be today in some quarters: All meats available to these people had been first offered to idols. That was a curse of idolatry. Every bit of the meat was offered to idols, and Daniel would not have any part in that which had to do with idolatry. So he refused.

Daniel also said that he could not drink the wine. Many of us believe that all four of these Hebrew young men were Nazarites. Back in the Book of Numbers, chapter 6, you'll find instructions for the Nazarite, a person separated wholly unto the Lord. One of the three things that he was not to do was drink wine or even get near it. I think Daniel and his three companions were Nazarites. They were separated unto God in this particular connection, and they did not believe that they should defile themselves. They were being obedient unto God.

In Daniel's day they had the Book of Isaiah, and they knew his admonition:

Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD. (Isaiah 52:11)

They wanted to be clean in God's sight.

Now somebody is going to ask, "Are you suggesting that today separation is a matter of diet?" And the answer is no. Somebody else asks, "Are we not delivered from this very thing in this age of grace?" The answer is yes, because Paul very clearly makes the statement that meat today has nothing in the world to do with our separation to God:

Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. (1 Corinthians 10:25-27)

Eat anything today that you want to eat. They package and sell rattlesnake meat in San Antonio, Texas! If you want to eat it, you can eat it, but don't invite me for dinner the day you serve it! It is a matter of taste these days. It has nothing to do with our separation to God. And Paul again enforced this:

But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. (1 Corinthians 8:8)

Meat has nothing to do with our relationship with God in this age of grace in which we live.

Then what is true Bible separation in this age of grace? The tendency is to draw a line down on questionable things and be dogmatic about debatable things. I have a letter here that is quite revealing. It came to me several years ago from someone who started with us when we first began our midweek service at the church I pastored in Los Angeles:

I've returned to California after a year of full-time Christian service in Ohio and an extended trip east. But I've come back almost spiritually shipwrecked. Have been a Christian for three and one-half years, and until recently was able to give a glowing testimony about being saved out of Unity. But lately I've been so dead that Christ seems way up there and I'm way down here. I have all the negative virtues of a Christian. I don't smoke, I don't drink, I don't play cards, I don't attend movies, I don't use makeup. But those things do not make a happy Christian. My friends tell me I'm becoming bitter, and oh, I don't want that to happen. Before becoming a Christian I was very ambitious, worked hard for whatever I believed in, and incidentally, was listed in *Who's Who*, but now I wonder, what's the use?

May I say to you, that was a sad state for this fine woman. Thank God, she came out of it, and she is still a separated Christian. But I think she found out what true separation is.

Will you note this very carefully. In the early ages of the church, monasteries were built, and the motive for them was good at first. Men were protesting against the licentiousness of the Roman Empire and the awful sin of that day. They said, "We want to withdraw from this!" They thought that by withdrawing they would solve their problems. But before long, it was worse on the *inside* of the monastery than it was on the *outside*. Do you know why? Because they weren't truly separated.

Let me paraphrase what Christ said to the Pharisees, "The trouble with you Pharisees is that you make the outside of the cup clean, but the inside of it is filled with corruption!" A great many people think today, *Well, if I just refrain from doing enough questionable things I'm a separated Christian*, although their hearts may be far from God. My beloved, separation is not whitewashing the outside of a tomb. There must be *life* on the inside first of all.

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.
(Titus 3:5)

Separation means that God has done a work first of all on the inside. We must be born from above. We must receive new life from God. We can't rub it on the outside.

Listen to this: "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself." He didn't try to isolate himself. In substance he said, "In my heart I'll be loyal to God, and that will regulate my conduct on the outside."

Daniel's separation back in the Old Testament is the same that Paul speaks of in the New Testament:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God [God has been merciful to you, and He has saved you! I beg of you, because He has been merciful to you...], ***that ye present*** [This same word is translated "yield" in Romans 6:13. That's active. It is an act of the will.] ***your bodies*** [Present or yield your total

personalities, meaning all you have, my friend, all you are. If God doesn't have you, He doesn't have anything. He doesn't even want your pocketbook. He wants *you*. I beseech you, I beg of you, that ye yield your total personalities...] ***a living sacrifice*** [Maybe when the occasion calls for it we could work up our courage and go out here to the Colosseum and die for Christ by being thrown to the lions. But it's this old humdrum living on Monday...Tuesday...Wednesday...Thursday... that's the hard thing.], ***holy*** [dedicated to God], ***acceptable unto God*** [God is encouraging us. He says in effect, "I want you to do this. You are the lost sinner, corrupt, ungodly, whom I have saved. And now it is acceptable for you to come and offer yourself to Me if you so purpose in your heart."], ***which is your reasonable*** [rational, intelligent, spiritual] ***service. And be not conformed to this world*** [this age]: ***but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.*** (Romans 12:1, 2)

Instead of being conformed, Daniel said, "I can't eat of this. I've purposed in my heart that I will not be conformed to the court of Nebuchadnezzar. I want to be yielded to God." Daniel's experience is ours. We are captives in this world in our bodies. And we cannot serve both God and mammon today, my friend.

There are two areas of Christian conduct. In one area the Bible is very clear, as we see in Romans 12 and 13. The duty of the Christian to the state is submission. He is to obey the laws of the land, he is to pay his taxes, and he is to show respect to those in authority. Also chapter 13 is specific on a believer's relationship to his neighbor: He is to pay his bills; he is not to commit adultery, kill, steal, bear false witness, nor covet what another has. In fact, he is to love his neighbor as himself. The believer is to be honest, and he is to avoid reveling, drunkenness, strife, and jealousy. The Bible is very clear on these things.

However, there is another area of Christian conduct on which the Bible has no clear word. It is not set out for us in black and white. For this grey area God has not laid down rules for us; instead He has given us three great guidelines. Although I am not going into detail with each one, I want to pass them on to you because they are so important.

Conviction

For example, He has said: "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Romans 14:5). In matters like this God has given us no rules, but He has given us principles, and the great principle here is of *conviction*. Whatever a Christian does today he should first purpose in his heart. And that's the answer to all things that are questionable. If there's any question in your mind about it, then it is wrong for you to do. Be fully persuaded in your own mind and carry out your conviction with enthusiasm.

Conscience

Then notice that the second principle concerning questionable conduct deals with doing something for God: "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth" (Romans 14:22). There must be *conscience*. Anything that a Christian looks back upon and has to say, "I wonder if I should have done that?" was wrong for him. It may not be wrong for the next man, so don't criticize the next man. But, my brother, it was wrong for you.

Consideration

Then the third principle: “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification” (Romans 15:1, 2). That is *consideration*. You know, friend, there may be something you can do that’s all right. Let’s not argue about what is right and what is wrong. The Bible is clear on those points. But that’s not the basis we are looking at here. Instead, the question is, are you driving somebody away from Christ by what you are doing? If so, it is wrong.

I have a friend who quit going to professional baseball. Oh, I hope you don’t misunderstand me, I’m not saying baseball is wrong, I’m just saying that he found out that there were a bunch of little boys following him, and he said, “In that stadium crowd I don’t think I can win them for the Lord.” Now that may not be for *you*. That was for *him*. You see, consideration of others is a principle, not a rule.

You see, my friend, when you believe and receive Jesus Christ, you come to the Lover of your soul. You are wedded to Him, and you love Him, and you are now trying to please Him. Can you imagine a fellow getting married and after the honeymoon is over he brings to his wife ten commandments that she is to follow? He’d better not, because the honeymoon would really be over! But suppose he comes into the kitchen and hangs on the wall the commandments: “You shall not date any other fellows any more. You shall cook my meals, etc.” What if he did a thing like that? To begin with, it would probably break her heart. I think she’d say, “I’m not going to date anybody else. I married *you*. I’m going to cook *your* meals, not because I have to but because I want to. I love you.”

My friend, today, Christian conduct is not how far you can go before you are wrong, it is what you can do to please your Savior. That’s Christian conduct. And to be separated to Him means to feel as Daniel felt when he “purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself” (Daniel 1:8).