Daniel: A Model for the Cultural Relevancy of the Believer

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Abstract

Daniel’s life in Babylon parallels the predicament of the church in the current culture. Just as the modern church has been placed in a culture that inhibits the worship of God, so Daniel was placed in a culture and kingdom that did the same. Because of his ability to impact his surrounding culture, this thesis looks to Daniel for principles on godly cultural relevancy. The first and largest part of this thesis follows the life of Daniel, citing key moments of his life, and noting his reaction to each situation. From Daniel’s actions as well as from the results of those actions, principles are drawn. The second part of this thesis seeks to apply those principles to the modern church.
Daniel: A Model for the Cultural Relevancy of the Believer

As believers God has placed us in a culture that resists God’s principles of holiness. Many questions have arisen regarding how much, if at all, believers should interact with their surrounding culture. The same topic brings to light the question, “At what point, if at all, should a believer disobey the authorities of that culture in order to serve God?”

Few biblical examples parallel the current predicament of the church as well as the life of the prophet Daniel. Like today’s church, Daniel was placed both in a culture and under authorities that asked him to disobey the Law of God. Unlike most of the current church, Daniel successfully impacted his surrounding culture without becoming morally tarnished by it. This makes Daniel a shining example for God’s people today.

As is made evident by Daniel, successful relevance in the culture does not require that believers relinquish their morality, nor does it require that they dissociate from the culture. Successful relevance does require that believers perform at a higher standard of quality in every area, including health, education, and job performance.

However, Daniel shows that at times the believer must stand against the authorities of the culture in order to be obedient to God. It is this segment of Daniel’s life that is most important to be applied by the believers of the current culture.

Success

Cultural relevancy is successful when it meets one main criterion. That is, when it glorifies God. The Shorter Catechism of The Westminster Confession of Faith (1990) says, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever” (p. 3). This truth is clearly presented in 1 Corinthians 10:31: “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or
whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Even more pointed is Romans 11:36: “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.” Clearly, man’s purpose is to glorify God.

For the believer then, success is when God is glorified above everything else. The goal of cultural relevancy, just like everything else in the Christian life, should be God’s glorification. In the attempt to be relevant, anything that does not honor God not only does not help the believer attain the goal, but also actively works against the goal. Therefore, all moral compromise is not and will never be required for the believer to successfully relate to his or her culture.

Clash of Culture

God’s Engineering of the Clash

As the book of Daniel opens, one immediately sees the first occurrence of a recurring theme in the story: God’s sovereignty in the raising and lowering of kings. One sees that it was God who allowed Nebuchadnezzar to take Jerusalem (Daniel 1:2). The story continually makes clear that every change of power, every rise of every leader is carefully designed and brought to pass by God. This is true not just for the kings mentioned in the book of Daniel, but also for Daniel himself as he is given favor in the eyes of everyone in authority over him. God raises up kings and knocks them down when they become prideful, all the while showing Himself to be powerful: “The text is seen as a continuous exposition of God’s sovereignty despite the ephemeral strength of earthly kings” (Woodard, 1994, p. 43). One main theme of the book of Daniel is that God is in control of kings, even pagan kings.
According to Arnold, the verb used to say that Nebuchadnezzar brought the articles into the treasure house of his god, is the same verb used to describe Nebuchadnezzar's order that Ashpenaz bring some of the children of Israel who had ability to serve in the king's palace. Arnold (2000) claims that using this verb implies both that Nebuchadnezzar looked at the captives the same as he looked at the spoils of war and that the Hebrew captives were under God's sovereign care just like the vessels from the temple were. This is significant because the text clearly states that God gave over some of the articles of the house of God into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1:1-2).

The Severity of the Clash

Daniel 1:7-8 shows the stark contrast between Daniel's Hebrew background and the pagan Babylonian setting he finds himself in:

To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego. But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

Arnold (2000) points out the author's desire to show contrast between Hebrew and Babylonian culture: "The word play contributes to the narrator's contrast between the worldviews, Babylonian versus Israelite, which is fundamental to the rest of the book" (p. 241).

Perhaps the most offensive action of the Babylonians against Daniel and his friends was the name change inflicted on them. Their names were the last outward mark
of their identity and heritage. Taking their names away left them with nothing of their Judean heritage save their memories of their families and the teaching received while still under the care of their parents: “The giving of new Babylonian names (verse 7) serves as the climax of the cultural clash” (Arnold, 2000, p. 242).

The severity of Babylon’s attempt to change Daniel is made evident in Daniel 1:7. Arnold (2000) brings to light the author of Daniel’s intention:

The narrator’s stair-step characterization of the Israelite lads in verses 3-7 seems to lend itself to the conclusion that the change from their Hebrew birth-names to new theophoric Babylonian names was the quintessential attack on their heritage and religious faith. Daniel could do nothing about such an attack, but he could resolve not to become personally defiled. And so the word play of verse 8 describes his only recourse. He set his heart against defilement just as the Babylonians were setting a new character and destiny on him, or so they thought. (p. 247)

By changing their names to fit the Babylonian theology, the Babylonians were attacking their culture and beliefs. The narrator of the book of Daniel uses word play in verse 8 in that he contrasts the Babylonians’ desire to change Daniel’s heritage, with Daniel’s strong resolve to retain his Hebrew heritage.

The core of the clash is not so much Daniel against the Babylonian culture as it is Nebuchadnezzar’s pride against God’s power. He is the first of a series of kings in the book of Daniel who try to raise themselves up over God’s power and are destroyed. Daniel clashes with Nebuchadnezzar’s culture because Nebuchadnezzar clashed with God, and Daniel was God’s, a member of His chosen people.
The believer should be encouraged that Daniel sits under the rule of at least three different earthly kings. The kings are raised up and knocked down by God, and by God’s grace Daniel remains constant. Arnold (2000) states that word play in Daniel 1:7-8, emphasizes the beginning of God’s pattern of the book of Daniel in which kings are raised, become prideful, and are humbled, all the while protecting Daniel. The author of Daniel plays with words in that he contrasts the chief of the eunuch’s desire to take away Hebrew heritage from Daniel and his friends, with Daniel’s firm resolve to stay faithful to God’s law.

Reaction to the Clash

Babylon strips away the preferred and the comfortable but Daniel is strengthened in clinging to the necessary. It is significant that as Daniel is stripped of every element of his Hebrew identity, he reacts with strengthened resolve by purposing not to defile himself with the king’s delicacies (Daniel 1:8). Though the Babylonians take away everything of Daniel’s culture including his name, he still stands morally unaffected and intellectually resolved. The bottom line is that Daniel was placed in a culture that went against his Hebrew faith and that attempted to remove everything Hebrew about Daniel.

Purpose

The Vitality of the Purpose

It qualified Daniel. Daniel’s decision in chapter 1, verse 8, is vital to the Christian’s understanding of cultural relevancy. John Walvoord (1971) said, “Worldly saints do not capture the world but become instead the world’s captives” (p. 30). The first and most important action that Daniel took in the area of cultural relevancy was his decision to keep his character completely intact. He purposed in his heart not to defile
himself with the delicacies of the king (Daniel 1:8). This was the key ingredient to Daniel’s success. His moral resolve was his passport to political positions, health, and protection. This decision caused him to keep his character intact. Everything God does through Daniel, He does because Daniel decided not to defile himself.

One might wonder about the status of the other Hebrew captives. Walvoord (1971) points out, “The corrupting influences of Babylon were probably too much for the others [other Hebrew captives], and they were useless in God’s hands” (p. 35). Ignoring God’s law in the face of testing results in the forfeiture of one’s ability to be used of God. In fairness, though, the text provides no concise evidence that there were any Hebrew captives other than Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, though the text seems to imply that there were. Apparently, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah followed Daniel’s example in not defiling themselves. There is no mention in Scripture of them purposing in their hearts not to defile themselves, but their actions imply that they did.

*It set Daniel apart.* The unique thing about Daniel was his commitment not to be defiled. Every other unique attribute of Daniel stems from his commitment to righteousness as will be shown later. His commitment not to be defiled was the first thing said about Daniel that was not said of any of the other Hebrew captives, though it is implied by the actions of his fellow Hebrew captives. According to Arnold (2000), the organization of the text in Daniel 1:8 seems to give more importance to Daniel’s moral resolve than it does his professional abilities listed earlier in the chapter:

The inner resolve and dedication revealed by the word play in verse 8 is the narrator’s full portrait of Daniel and transcends even the description of his impressive personal and intellectual skills in verse 3-4. It is his commitment to
God that sets Daniel apart, and prepares the reader for the continued conflict between aggressive world powers and God’s servants. (p. 248)

Daniel’s morality then is the most important element in his ability to relate to and impact his surrounding culture.

*Reason for the Purpose*

There is no certainty as to why eating the king’s delicacies and drinking his wine would bring about defilement. According to John Whitcomb (1985), it has nothing to do with food laws in relation to animals being clean or unclean, because there was no law against wine. Baldwin (1978) believed that eating of the king’s table would have symbolized friendship with the king and that would have caused defilement (p.83). Whitcomb (1985) refutes this idea by saying that Daniel is not shown to have insulted Nebuchadnezzar in any way. Instead, Whitcomb proposes that Daniel possibly found out that the grain was not offered to idols as the meat and wine would have been, making the grain clean for eating.

*Carrying Out the Purpose*

*Daniel maintained obedience.* Daniel’s subordinate spirit in Daniel 1:8-14 is an important virtue that helps him reach his goal of glorifying God through his culture. Daniel avoided conflict whenever possible. Rather than refuse the delicacies of the king with protestation and defiance, he requests permission not to defile himself (verse 8). This shows his commitment to obey authority, even the authority of his captors, whenever possible.

*Daniel allowed God’s law to be tested.* Knowing the Law of God to be perfect, Daniel requested that it be tested so that he would be permitted to obey it when it proved
itself (Daniel 1:11-14). It also speaks of his knowledge of God’s law and his understanding of it. Obedience always triumphs over compromise.

The Purpose Tested and Proven

At the end of the trial period, Daniel and his friends appeared healthier than the other captives (Daniel 1:15). This test proved Daniel’s convictions to be profitable as well as moral, even in the eyes of his unbelieving captors. This is seen in the fact that the steward takes away the portion of the king’s delicacies from the captives and gives them a diet of vegetables and water (Daniel 1:16). The moral lifestyle God commands believers to live will be proven to be the best way of life, even to the unbeliever, if the Christian will stand strong and allow his convictions to be tested. This is one of many instances of Daniel and his godly friends doing everything better than their ungodly peers. In this case, it was their health that proved better than all others.

The Result of Daniel’s Purpose: God’s Glory

Wisdom and understanding: the result of righteousness. Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III (1993) say that Daniel’s stand led to God granting wisdom and understanding in all dreams to Daniel, and not just any wisdom, but wisdom superior to the wisdom of the other wise men of Babylon. Daniel 1:20 states, “And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm.”

God’s glory: the result of wisdom and understanding. It is this skill and wisdom, used in Daniel 2:1-45 when Daniel not only interpreted the dream but knew what it was without being told by Nebuchadnezzar, that brings glory to God in Daniel 2:47: “The king answered Daniel, and said, ‘Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings,
and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret.” It also brings promotion to Daniel in Daniel 2:48: “Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and made him a ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon.” Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2:24-45, and as a result, Nebuchadnezzar promotes Daniel, making him chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon and ruler over the province of Babylon. What is more, Nebuchadnezzar gives God glory for Daniel’s interpretation of the dream (Daniel 2:47-48).

The logical progression of Daniel’s promotion began with his moral stand in Daniel 1. When Daniel was proven faithful, God gave Daniel wisdom and skill in interpreting dreams. Daniel 1:17 says, “As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.” Then, God used the skill He had given Daniel not only to bring Himself glory, but also to promote Daniel to a higher level of authority where God’s name could be further glorified (Daniel 2). At that position, Daniel interpreted two dreams for Nebuchadnezzar, one in Daniel 2 and one in Daniel 4. Both of them result in God’s glorification. Thus, Daniel accomplished his purpose of glorifying God through relating to his surrounding culture through his skill and political position.

Note that God’s glory in the book of Daniel is always coupled with Daniel’s humility. Never does Daniel take any of the credit for what God does through him. For instance, in Daniel 2:27-28 Daniel explains that he cannot interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, but God can. Also, in Daniel 6:22, Daniel explains that it was God who protected him from the lions: “Whatever divine wisdom comes to Daniel, he states explicitly that
such supernatural insight exceeds his own capacity to comprehend and to cope. That is godly humility” (Woodard, 1994, p. 49).

Blend with Culture

Knowing that Daniel refused to follow Babylonian culture when it conflicted with God’s commands, one might wonder if Daniel refused to follow Babylonian culture in all areas, seeing as how it was most decidedly a pagan culture. Clearly, Daniel followed and even embraced every other area of Babylonian culture mentioned in the book of Daniel. In fact, the only times Daniel stood against the Babylonian culture were when that culture stood directly against God’s Law.

Everything Daniel did was done in the same manner as the Babylonians as long as it did not require that he disobey God’s law, and everything Daniel did was done better than the Babylonians would do it. Daniel’s superiority is evidenced in his diet, his education, and his governmental positions. Each time he was confronted with the possibility of compromise, he remained faithful and was raised up in position.

Cultural Relevancy in Daniel’s Education

Daniel 1:5 states that three years of training were appointed for Daniel and his friends. This would have been the best training available not only because the purpose of the training was to prepare them to serve the king, but also because of the level of education available in Babylon at that time. According to Whitcomb (1985), “Babylon was now the intellectual center of the world” (p. 32). With the high level of education available and the importance of Daniel’s future position, he would have received the best education possible. Walvoord (1971) states, “With the possible exceptions of Moses and
Solomon, Daniel was the most learned man in the Old Testament and most thoroughly trained for his important role in history and literature” (p. 29).

Babylon was the best place possible for Daniel to study. He had a wonderful education. Whitcomb (1985) writes:

Though Babylon was now the intellectual center of the world, and Nebuchadnezzar was its most brilliant monarch, Daniel and his friends exhibited wisdom that this great king and his kingdom had never known. Nor was it all purely miraculous wisdom. Much hard work and self-discipline were involved. (p. 32)

The education Daniel received was vital to his cultural relevance. To shine in the intellectual and political realm, Daniel had to be educated on the same level as his peers. He “needed to be deeply versed in the Chaldean wisdom, as formerly Moses was in the wisdom of Egypt (Acts 7:22), so as to be able to put to shame the wisdom of this world by the hidden wisdom of God” (Keil, 1955, p. 83). Being trained with the education of the Babylonians allowed Daniel to be set in a position where God could show His power to be infinitely greater that all the other Babylonian sorcerers. Exemplary education was imperative.

*Cultural Relevancy in Daniel’s Interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream in Daniel 2*

*The pagan sorcerers were inadequate.* After hearing Nebuchadnezzar’s order to tell both his dream and its interpretation, the Chaldeans answer by telling the king, “There is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh” (Daniel 2:11). Though carrying with them the same education Daniel had received, they failed.
Daniel interpreted in the style of the Babylonians. According to Jack N. Lawson (1997), Daniel 2 strongly emphasizes the difference between Daniel's ability and Chaldeans' lack of wisdom:

In Daniel 2, a radical distinction is made between Daniel's ability to interpret the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar and the failure of the Babylonian wise men. The implication is made that while Daniel receives his skill directly from God, the Babylonian mantics owe nothing of their skills to divine revelation—a view endorsed by many commentators and theologians. (p. 61)

If divine wisdom is the difference between Daniel and the Chaldeans, then it would seem that they were similar in other areas. Norman Porteous (1965) would agree:

The difference between the wise men and Daniel is, not a difference of genius or skill, but simply the fact that God has chosen to use Daniel and not the wise men who have nothing but their [encycledias] of dream interpretation to guide them. (p. 44)

The emphasis, then, is on what Daniel has that the Babylonians do not: spiritual revelation from God. On all other points, Daniel and the Chaldeans bear similarities.

Daniel 2 presents Daniel as being similar to his Babylonian counterparts.

According to Lawson (1997), “Daniel, rather than appearing as a Judean wise man or prophet, appears more in the mould of a Mesopotamian mantic sage” (p. 61). Daniel is blending with his culture in all areas save the realm of morality: “Thus, rather than representing a departure from the Mesopotamian norm, Daniel presents us with a fusion of Hebrew and Mesopotamian cultures” (Lawson, 1997, p. 61). Could it be that the best
way to glorify the Father is to blend in with culture in every way save morality? The account of Daniel’s life seems to answer affirmatively.

*God was glorified.* The real test of Daniel’s actions is whether or not God was glorified by them. In Daniel 2:27-45, Daniel tells the king the dream and its interpretation as God had revealed it to him. God receives glory both from Daniel and from King Nebuchadnezzar as a result of the interpretation.

Daniel glorified God in verses 20-23 after receiving the revelation from God. Then, in verses 27 and 28, Daniel gives God all of the credit for the revelation and interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. Daniel’s glorification of God means that he has fulfilled his purpose at least on a personal plane.

Daniel’s cultural relevancy proved to bring God glory when Nebuchadnezzar praised God in Daniel 2:47 saying, “Truly, your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret.” Nebuchadnezzar glorified God because God revealed and interpreted his dream through Daniel: “The God of Israel provides a service to the king of Babylon, but in a way that was well within the parameters of Nebuchadnezzar’s experience” (Lawson, 1997, p. 61). So it is, then, that God spoke to Nebuchadnezzar through Daniel in a format culturally understandable to him, and God was glorified as a result.

*Cultural Relevancy in Daniel’s Interpretation of the Writing on the Wall*

*Respect was Daniel’s prerequisite for position.* Daniel remained respected and used during the reign of Belshazzar as is evidenced in Daniel 5:11,12. It is because of this respect that Daniel is trusted to interpret the writing on the wall at Belshazzar’s feast.
Babylonians were attentive to omens. Omens can be described as signs, usually of the paranormal nature, that prophesy future events. Special attention needs to be given to the account of Daniel’s interpretation of the writing on the wall. It is a unique example of cultural relevancy that is brought to light with an understanding of Babylonian sorcery: “Omens were an extremely popular way of trying to tell the future throughout the existence of Babylonian culture” (Millard, 1985, p. 77). Being accustomed to the idea of omens, the Babylonians were attentive when the obvious omen of a hand writing on the wall appeared. The very fact that God uses an omen is evidence of His willingness to assert Himself through culture.

The ungodly sorcerers were inadequate for the task at hand. While Belshazzar and his wise men knew that the writing on the wall was an omen, they had no idea how to interpret it, leaving opportunity for God to show Himself powerful through His servant, Daniel: “Babylonian experts catalogued thousands of ominous signs... When Belshazzar demanded to know what the writing on the wall meant, the wise men of Babylon, no doubt, turned to these omen encyclopedias. But they proved worthless” (Millard, 1985, p. 77). They were worthless because they were all based on former occurrences (Millard, 1985, p. 77). A hand writing on the wall was not something they had seen before.

Daniel’s method for interpretation was Babylonian. This is an example of Daniel’s Chaldean education coming in to play to bring glory to God. Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall using the same method of interpretation the Babylonian experts often used, which was a way of matching words with meanings that belong to words that sound like the word seen:
Daniel’s education embraced the most advanced Babylonian knowledge, according to Daniel 1:17-20, so he would have known the ways in which the diviners worked. His explanation followed a method familiar to them, so they would understand and readily accept his explanation.

(Millard, 1985, p. 77)

Daniel’s interpretational style gave the interpretation credence with the Babylonians:

“The Babylonian experts sometimes tried to apply old texts to current circumstances by means of a play on words” (Millard, 1985, p.77). Millard (1985) explains this interpretational style:

MENE is related to the verb “to count”; TEKEL (Hebrew: shekel) is related to the verb “to weigh.” Thus, Belshazzar was counted or weighed—and found wanting.

For PERES, Daniel simply took the sound of the word, as the Babylonian experts might have, and interpreted it as referring to the Persians. Thus, the Persians would fall heir to Belshazzar’s kingdom, as indeed they did. (p. 77)

God used Daniel to speak to the Babylonians through their culture. The fact that God worked through their culture caused the Babylonians to give ear to the message and understand its subject matter.

Fight with Culture

Perhaps Daniel’s most famous test of character occurs under the reign of Darius. Darius had set 120 satraps over the kingdom and three governors over the satraps. Daniel was one of these governors (Daniel 6:1, 2).
Daniel distinguished himself over the other governors because of his “excellent spirit.” This made the other governors jealous enough to try to get Daniel removed (Daniel 6:3,4).

Struggles among the king’s advisors were not uncommon. According to Van Der Toorn (1998), “The story of Daniel’s rise, fall, and restoration... reflects the experience of a fair number of Babylonian and Assyrian scholars” (p. 628). Apparently, rivalry was common among the king’s advisors. “The court scholars were very much dependent upon the king’s favor for their position, prestige, and livelihood” (Van Der Toorn, 1998, p. 628). Such an environment made the well-liked Daniel a target for attack:

The competition for jobs and the best positions did not foster a spirit of goodwill and collegiality among the scholars. In their letters to the king they strike an apologetic tone when they are discussing their own advice, whereas the work of rival scholars is often the object of their criticism and ridicule. (Van Der Toorn, 1998, p. 628)

The governors knew, though, that Daniel had upstanding moral character. This meant that they could not find anything with which to accuse him. Therefore, they found a way to make his righteous way of living against the law. They talked Darius into making it illegal to pray to anyone but him for 30 days (Daniel 6:4-9).

The governors could find no fault in Daniel. If they had found any broken law in his past or any breach in his integrity, they would have used that to incarcerate him instead of prohibiting the practice of prayer. Had that happened there would have been no opportunity for God to show Himself powerful in Daniel’s predicament.
As is well known, Daniel commits one of the most famous acts of civil disobedience ever made in that he directly disobeys the unrighteous law of Darius. When Daniel found out about the law prohibiting prayer to God, Daniel went home and prayed three times as he customarily did (Daniel 6:10). He defies the law because it required that he break God's law and give glory to an earthly king instead of God.

One might ask why Daniel did not follow precedence and ask for permission to petition God rather than the king as he had asked permission not to defile himself with the king's delicacies in Daniel 1:8. The reason is because this was a written decree from King Darius rather than a simple order. Not even the king could change decrees. Decrees and statutes were either obeyed or disobeyed, never changed (Daniel 6:15).

Romans 13 in Relation to Civil Disobedience

It has been the trend in current Christianity to obey even the laws that prohibit the worship of God. Often, Christians cite Romans 13:1, which tells believers to submit to authority, because God ordains authority. What is often neglected, though, is that in Romans 13:3-4, Paul gives believers the reason for obeying authority. Christians obey authority "for rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil" (Romans 13:4). The reason believers are to obey authority is because authority is supposed to prohibit evil and ensure the ability to do good without repercussions. When authority ceases to prohibit evil and protect goodness, it is the responsibility of the righteous to disobey.

When Romans 13:1-5 is harmonized with Daniel's actions in Daniel 6:10, it is made clear that obedience to authority only extends as far as the moral uprightness of that governmental authority. Believers should never sacrifice their worship of God in the
name of obedience to governmental authority. Daniel lives out this principle in Daniel 6 with his act of civil disobedience.

Results of Civil Disobedience

Daniel was forced to suffer the punishment for breaking the law (Daniel 6:15-16). The fact that Daniel was obeying God’s Law by disobeying man’s law did not exempt him from judicial punishment, nor was the fact that he was made susceptible to punishment imply that he was out of God’s will by disobeying the decree of Darius.

Daniel was protected by God. Deliverance from the lions proved God’s power over the laws and ways of men. God showed that it did not matter what law man established, nor did it matter what punishment man set for that law. He was sovereign over it.

Daniel brought glory to God through his civil disobedience. As mentioned before, the end result of every action of every believer should be God’s glory. God’s glorification was certainly the result of Daniel’s civil disobedience. Even King Darius glorified God, making a decree that everyone in his kingdom should tremble before God, the antithesis of his earlier decree in Daniel 6:8-9 (Daniel 6:26-27). Perhaps more encouraging is his proclamation of God’s power:

For He is the living God,

And steadfast forever;

His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed,

And His dominion shall endure to the end.

He delivers and rescues,

And He works signs and wonders
In heaven and on earth,
Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. (Daniel 6:26b-27)

Darius’ proclamation is part of the grand theme of the book of Daniel: the exaltation and abasement of kings resulting in the glorification of God. Darius may be the best example of this theme.

Contemporary Application

What applicable bearing does the life of Daniel have in modern Christian living? The remainder of this thesis is an attempt to apply the principles of the book of Daniel to the current situation of the church.

The Separation of Church and Everything

As He did with Daniel, God has set His people in a culture that wishes to strip them of every shred of godliness recognizable within them. Thankfully, in general most Christians have retained their spiritual heritage. Unfortunately, most believers have not allowed their light to shine in their culture. According to Bob Briner (1993), “What we’ve really done is create a ghetto that is easily dismissed by the rest of society” (p. 31). Believers no longer influence the world leaders and fashion makers of society as Daniel once did in his society.

What has stopped believers? Why do Christians run away from culture rather than influence it? The answer is best put forth by Soren Kierkegaard (1962):

The age of great and good actions is past, the present is the age of anticipation when even recognition is received in advance. No one is satisfied with doing something definite, every one wants to feel flattered by reflection with the illusion of having discovered at the very least a new continent. (p. 36)
Believers have become so preoccupied with patting each other’s backs as well as their own that they have neglected or even refused to notice that they are not getting much done. Bob Briner (1993) writes, “We feel we are making a difference because we are so important to ourselves” (p. 31).

Along with the self-gratifying attitude in Christian media, there has seeped in a subconscious, yet debilitating belief that Christians cannot influence the secular media that seems to have the culture in its unforgiving clutches. No one, especially believers, really believes that Christians are powerful anymore: “I believe it has been the pessimistic vision of the church that has prevented generations of young people from venturing out into the culture-shaping professions of our world” (Briner, 1993, p. 33).

Why have Christians lost their power? It is because they have lost sight of the gospel. Paul taught in Romans 1:16 that the gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation. In his commentary on Romans, Alva McClain (1973) wrote, “If the church has lost its power, it is because it has lost the gospel, because the gospel is the power” (p. 57). Somewhere, sometime, believers forgot that God’s Word was powerful, and they became very afraid. Speaking the gospel fearlessly is the first step toward making an impact once again.

The power that helped Daniel pray with his window open, not caring what would happen to him, is the same power that should cause modern believers to kneel in public arenas where prayer is prohibited.
The Reintegration of Believers into Culture

Reintegration in Morality

Following Daniel's example, the first step towards cultural relevancy is Biblical morality. As Daniel purposed in his heart not to allow himself to be defiled with the king's delicacies (Daniel 1:8), believers must purpose not to compromise their morality to match it with the world's. Christians need to live blamelessly. Until the church proves itself to be cleaner than the world, the people of the world will not recognize that the church has anything different than they do.

Reintegration in Professionalism

Daniel proved himself to be better at everything than everyone else. Believers today should follow his example. The result of Daniel's professionalism was always that his employers glorified God. If believers were the best at every thing they did, as Daniel was, then people would want to know why.

The lack of Christians in the professional world has caused a disinterest in the secular realm. Until believers show themselves to perform at a higher standard than their unsaved counterparts, their employers will not be interested to hear what they have to say about spiritual things. However, for the believer, excellence in professionalism always brings glory to God.

Reintegration in Culture

Daniel did everything in the same manner as the Babylonians. His interpretation of dreams and omens was all done with Babylonian methods. Even Daniel's education was Babylonian. Daniel's ability to relate came at the price of hard work. Believers in the modern world need to follow his example. As Baldwin (1978) wrote, "the Christian
today must work hard at the religions and cultures amongst which he lives, if different thought worlds are ever to meet” (p. 80-81).

One cannot give a good answer until he has heard the question, and it is hard for him to answer the questions unless he knows the language the inquisitor speaks. When believers understand and relate to their culture, they will make the greatest impact.

Reintegration in Civil Disobedience

Daniel disobeyed authority. He would not allow man-made law to inhibit God-commanded worship, nor should modern Christians. Defiance in the face of tyranny is as much a virtue as obedience under the authority of a godly ruler.

The privilege of public prayer has been and is being removed a step at a time from the list of American freedoms. Unfortunately, believers have claimed Romans 13 and have gone with the flow. Public prayer is the ideal venue for civil disobedience in the current American predicament.

Reintegration of God’s Glory

Every act of cultural relevancy and civil disobedience committed by Daniel in the book of Daniel brought glory to God. Through Daniel’s humility and ability God did miraculous things, bringing Himself glory. May the day come soon when the leaders of the world clearly proclaim the greatness of God as Nebuchadnezzar and Darius once did in Daniel’s time.

Conclusion

Truly, today’s church has been placed in a culture that resists God’s principles of holiness. Daniel’s life is an example to every believer from which to derive principles
pertaining to how one must relate to his surrounding culture for the purpose of bringing glory to God.

Several principles are made evident by Daniel’s life. First, the prerequisite for cultural relevancy is moral uprightness. It is impossible to impact the people of the culture for the glorification of the Father without maintaining an impeccable moral lifestyle. Second, excellence in all areas of life, specifically the areas of health, education, and job performance, is required to impact the culture with optimal results. Third, so far as righteousness will allow, it is always best for the believer to understand and speak through the cultural norms of whatever society he finds himself in. Fourth, it is always necessary for the believer to defy the culture, even the authorities of that culture when it orders immoral behavior. Lastly, the end of every activity, including cultural relevancy, of every believer should be to bring glory to God.

Few biblical examples parallel the current predicament of the church as well as the life of the prophet, Daniel. Daniel successfully impacted his surrounding culture without becoming morally tarnished by it. Daniel is such a shining example for God’s people today, because of his ability to impact his surrounding culture.

As is made evident by Daniel, successful relevance in the culture does not require that believers relinquish their morality, nor does it require that they dissociate from the culture. However, successful relevance does require that believers perform at a higher standard of quality in every area, including health, education, and job performance.

There is hope that believers will gain a new understanding for the power of the gospel and the need to spread it in the culture. When Christians gain that understanding
and begin to apply it, there will be drastic change in the present culture. Daniel is evidence of that possibility.
References


