

Standing Firm in a Culture of Compromise

Identity Theft

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Being Right or Being Righteous

If we study the life of prophet Daniel and the dilemma he faced, we can learn to engage our culture without compromising our faith. He faced drastic differences & diversity and endured the immorality and corruption of a shifting culture of ancient Babylon, that closely resembles our own. Here is how it happened:

After the reigns of King David and his son Solomon splintered along geographical and tribal lines. Within a few generations, the 10 northern tribes of Israel abandoned their faith in the living God and started worshipping idols. Obviously, God was not pleased and sent warning after warning to the northern kingdom. As they kept ignoring and dwelt in disobedience, God allowed the Assyrians to conquer all ten tribes in the northern kingdom (2 Kings 17).

Judah, including the smaller tribe of Benjamin, comprised the southern kingdom, where Daniel lived. Despite watching what happened to their northern kinsmen, the remaining people of Israel also drifted away from God. Again, God issued the same kind of warnings through His prophets—Jeremiah, Habakkuk and Zephaniah. But the nation of Judah refused to hear the messages of these men. This time judgment arrived in the form of Babylonians under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar. Having already conquered Assyria and Egypt, they descended on Judah and decimated the city of Jerusalem. They not only looted the temple but also enslaved the Jewish people. The people of Israel became prisoners of war in an alien culture, exiled from their homeland.

Daniel was one of the exiles. He was probably around 16 years old when he was transported along with thousands of other Jews to be enslaved in Babylon. For the next 70 years of his life, Daniel faced life-threatening tests—from watching friends endure a fiery furnace to spending the night in a lion den. But even when the foreign culture shifted around him, Daniel never wavered in his faith. With humble confidence, Daniel glorified God through his actions and speech. His character and conduct stood out because it was both respectful and resolute. He knew being right and being righteous are not the same.

Notice the very first thing that happened to Daniel and his friends once they arrived in Babylon: {Read Daniel 1:3-4, 7}. In those days, when victors integrated enslaved captives into their own culture, it was customary to change the captives' names as a sign of ownership. The Israelites belonged to their captors now; no longer would they be known by their old names from their homeland. But these Babylonian names were not simply different names; these new names were meant to obliterate (destroy completely) the Israelites' identities.

They were a mockery to their Jewish heritage

They turned truth inside out

They were idolatrous names.

By comparing the original and Babylonian names of these four Hebrew young man, we get a clear picture of our Enemy's strategy—the same one he uses on us today. He labels us with a new name, so he can lie to us about a false identity. Let's take a closer look how this happened to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

From Daniel: "God is my judge" **to Belteshazzar:** "Lady, protect the king"

The first thing the Babylonian did was change the gender of Daniel's name—an inherent part of each person's identity. They also shifted the focus from God to human. With this new name, Daniel's identity, at least on paper, changed from a man held accountable by an all-powerful God to that of a woman who must protect her king. The meaning of Daniel's new name was the antithesis (direct apposite) of his former name.

From Hananiah: "Yahweh has been gracious" **to Shadrach:** "I am fearful of god"

The Babylonian inverted the focus from God being good to God being bad. Instead of viewing Him as gracious, kind and loving (all implied by the name Hananiah), this new name echoed with the king of fear you would feel standing before a tyrant, cruel, oppressive, wild, a maniac or a monster.

From Mishael: "Who can compare to my God? No one!" **to Meshach:** "I am despised, contemptible and humiliated". Once again, the Babylonian chose a name that subverted the goodness of God in our relationship to Him. It shifted the focus from our confidence in God to cowardice

From Azariah: "Yahweh has helped" **to Abednego:** "The servant of Nebo".

Azariah went from being a son of heir of Yahweh, a term of endearment for the living God, to being, the slave of another man.

As you can see, in every case, the Hebrew captives' new name obliterated the true nature of God that had been represented by their names. The Babylonian's reoriented their identities to become people who served their Babylonian masters.

Let us review the shifts in identity:

Daniel: (1) Male to female. (2) Focus on God to focus on man,

Hananiah: (1) Gracious loving God to Tyrannical God to be feared,
(2) Focus on God to focus on man

Mishael: (1) Focus on God to focus on self. (2) Confidence to cowardice

Azariah: (1) Son of God to slave of man.

We still see the Enemy looking for opportunities to cast confusion on God's goodness and our identities today. Consider for example, the way society continues to redefine gender, gender relationships and marriage, which is reminiscent (tending to remind) of the gender change in Daniel's renaming. Things which were once inherent to who we are, have now become flexible and up for debate. Our culture claims these qualities can be shaped to suit what a person wants with no regard for God's original design.

But you and I know this is not true! There is a purpose in how God makes us, and we must clearly know who we are in Christ to stand firm instead of accepting to who our culture says we should be.

Another way the Enemy tries to change our identities is by making it seem foolish to remain faithful to God. These days it is done through many different methods, from comedy to satire to controversy and scandal within the church. If the devil can discredit the Bible & disgrace the church through division, dissension and immorality, then he is succeeded.

As a result, most Christians today are intimidated by the world. We've become convinced we should keep our faith private, relegated to church one day a week. The world is so bold in expressing its multitude of beliefs, convictions and made-up truths, while most Christians are shamed into silence, so embarrassed by their faith that they even become apologetic in a way that has nothing to do with sharing the gospel. This is exactly what our Enemy wants to accomplish through a cultural identity change. He wants to distract us from focusing on our relationships with God and instead get us to focus on pleasing us. Being enslaved to their approval. It's easy to get caught up in the number of likes, Facebook friends, positive comments and likes we can accumulate. It feels good to have this seemingly clear proof that we have value, that our choices have value, that they are right. It is intoxicating, this 24-hour access to continual validation (legally valid).

Catalysts for Change

Daniel stood firm and loved everyone around him—just as Jesus did. Just as we are called to do when culture shifts. I know it's not easy to balance truth and grace in the midst of such drastic cultural change. It's easy to disengage and try to avoid culture altogether. It's easier to judge and condemn those who don't agree with us. It's even easier to accept anything and everything. But that is not what we are called to do or who we're called to be.

While God calls us to be His people set-apart, He also commands us to go into all the world and share the good news of Jesus Christ. The same problems that existed in biblical times continue to exist & challenge us today. Question arises how can we remain anchored in our Christian faith when the cultural change/shift threaten to carry us away? Daniel's example shines and provides us a clear model of how to live a godly life in an evil culture.

To answer this question, let's dig deep in the Word of God.

There is constant tension between who God says we are and who the world says we should be. This is why- it is so important to dwell on the certainty of who God says we are and live out the purpose he made us for. In Jeremiah 1:5 God says "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

So, from this we see that intertwined with who we are is God's unique purpose for our life. Once we understand this purpose, we will know our true-identity. Knowing who God made us to be, keeps us anchored in His will and influences every decision we make and every task we take. Purpose is our identity in action and when we are secure in that identity, our impact will make an eternal difference. Look at Jesus' 7 "I am" in the gospel of John.

1. I am the Bread of Life ([Jn. 6:35-51](#)).
2. I am the Light of the World ([Jn. 8:12](#); [9:5](#)).
3. I am the Door of the Sheep ([Jn. 10:7-9](#)).
4. I am the Good Shepherd ([Jn. 10:11-14](#)).
5. I am the Resurrection and Life ([Jn. 11:25](#)).
6. I am the Way, Truth, and Life ([Jn. 14:6](#)).
7. I am the True Vine ([Jn. 15:1-6](#)).

Jesus was very sure about His identity and purpose. In John 8:14(b), He says "I know where I came from and where I am going...". You can notice the surety and assurance of Jesus. Jesus' identity is found in His purpose. What about us/church? How do we find our purpose and identity in life? There are two ways we find purpose in life:

(1) Go to the source. (2) Look at our design

1. We have to go to our source—the creator. Only creator(God) knows best. **Colossians 1:16 (NKJV)** ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. So He is the source of all creation.

The person we now know as Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, existed as an equal member of the Godhead from all eternity ([Isa. 7:14](#); [9:6-7](#); [Mic. 5:2](#); [Jn. 1:1-2](#); [Heb. 1:8](#); [Rev. 1:8-11](#)). Before He became God's Son (sonship refers to humanity, not to deity, note, [Acts 13:33](#)). He was a spirit being and carried out the divine plan of creation. He was the direct agent of God the Father who created all things by Him ([Isa. 9:6](#); [Jn. 1:3](#); [Eph. 3:9](#); [Heb. 1:3](#))

Ephesians 1:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

We also have obtained an inheritance along with all the other blessings of [Eph. 1:3-9](#). We now possess it in Christ by promise but it will not be ours in reality until the end of life of sowing to the Spirit ([Mt. 5:5](#); [19:29](#); [25:34](#); [1Cor. 6:9-10](#); [15:50](#); [Gal. 5:21](#); [Eph. 1:14,18](#); [5:5](#); [Col. 1:12](#); [3:24](#); [Heb. 6:12](#); [9:15](#); [1Pet. 1:4](#); [Rev. 21:7](#)). We only get the earnest or first fruit of it now by the Spirit ([Eph. 1:13-14](#)).

2. We have to look at our design—God is creatively and actively involved in the development of human life. He personally cares for a baby from the moment of conception. Psalm 139:13-14 talks about it in some details.

Psalm 139:13-14 (NKJV)

¹³ For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I will praise You, for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made; Marvellous are Your works, And *that* my soul knows very well.

Because He is our designer & creator, He knows how we think, how we feel. In V16 of the psalm, we see the assurance of God's plan. This is another reason we must look closely how God made us and what His plans might be for us. In other words, it requires our personality and gift assessment in light of God's Word.

Psalm 139:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When *as yet there were* none of them.

Four things we need to know about our purpose:

1. **I am a minister**—A nursing term and as such implies to look for need around us and help. We can be part of common & collective purpose as well as a unique purpose.

1 Peter 2:9 (NKJV)

⁹ But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light. Believers collectively are set apart for God and His kingdom as a holy nation and to proclaim the gospel of salvation for His glory and praise.

2. **I am a minister with a specific purpose. Ephesians 2:10 (NKJV)**

¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand(in advance) that we should walk in them. Here, we can choose a particular area of service for the extension of God's kingdom, according to our personality and skills.

3. **I have an opportune time**—we need to see that God chose us for time as this when problems/issues and culture change is getting out of control. This off-course provides an opportunity and its our time to stand firm for our values & beliefs and proclaim the good news of Jesus. **Ephesians 5:15-16 (NKJV)**

¹⁵ See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,

¹⁶ redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

It means to walk about watching on every hand to avoid danger and enemies -- live the gospel by watching your conduct. Buying up those moments which others throw away. Improve every moment to make up for those lost in sin.

4. **I can make an eternal difference**—social justice without spiritual justice is no solution and the vice-versa. **1 Corinthians 3:11-15 (NKJV)**

¹¹ For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus

Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones,

wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Believers will be judged concerning:

1. Doctrines ([Rom. 2:14-16](#); [Rom. 14](#))
2. Conduct to others ([Mt. 18](#); [Rom. 14](#))
3. Carnal traits ([Col. 3](#); [Rom. 1-2](#); [8:1-13](#); [14:1-23](#))
4. Words ([Mt. 12:32-37](#); [Rom. 14](#))
5. Things that affect others: slander, quarrels, idle words, foolishness (folly), dishonesty, broken promises, wrong dealings, etc. ([Rom. 1:29-32](#); [1Cor. 6:9-11](#); [Gal. 5:19-21](#); [Col. 3](#); [Eph. 4:1-32](#); [5:1-33](#); [Rom. 12:1-21](#); [14:1-23](#))
6. Things that affect themselves: neglected opportunities, talents wasted, loose living, lack of spirituality, etc. ([Rom. 2:14-16](#); [Heb. 2:1-4](#); [Gal. 5:1-26](#); [6:1-10](#); [Col. 3](#))
7. Things that affect God: refusal to walk in the light, disobedience, rejection, failure to cooperate and yield to the Spirit, etc. ([1Cor. 12](#); [Rom. 12](#); [Eph. 4:1-32](#); [5:1-33](#))

We should be able to say: I am a minister with a specific purpose, at an opportune time to make an eternal difference in the culture I live.

In response to Daniel's steadfast faith and commitment to both truth & grace, God demonstrated his supernatural power and honoured the one who honoured Him by blessing Daniel with respect of 4 different Babylonian emperors. Finally, the last one—Cyrus, granted the Jewish people freedom so they could return home.... Now that's influence!

May God strengthen our faith and our walk with Him, through Christ so that we can have the same influence as Daniel had.....Amen.