

Daniel 1:19

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[0 : 00] We shall turn again to Daniel chapter 1, reading at verse 19. Daniel chapter 1 and verse 19.

And the king communed with him, and among them all was found none like Daniel, Ananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, who therefore stood they before the king.

Now, as I'm sure all of us know, Daniel belongs to the time of the exile in Babylon.

And that exile was a time of tremendous crisis for the Old Testament church. In their own land in Israel, their faith had been dominant.

It had controlled the whole of society. It had controlled education, politics, commerce, government, law, social life, recreation, every aspect of human existence.

[1 : 22] They lived in a theocracy in which their religion was respected, it was accepted, it was in almost total control.

And suddenly they're pitchforked into a very different situation. One in which their faith is a minority.

One in which their faith has no influence on culture or politics, in the life of the surrounding civilization.

They find that what they stand for is to a large extent despised. It is certainly quite inconsequential.

In large measure, in fact, their position was similar to ours today in our own society.

[2 : 29] Because like them, we are a tiny minority, trying to survive in a sea of paganism, of indifference, and hostility.

They faced the same problems, the same contempt, the same crisis of relevance, as we face in our situation.

And even more, they faced the constant and daily embarrassment of trying to be God's children in a world that didn't understand.

And a world that constantly subjected them to all kinds of pressure and all kinds of temptation. And I want this morning to explore the meaning of this first chapter very much along those lines to ask what its lessons are with regard to our relations today with the pagan and unbelieving world in which we are called to live as the children of God.

And I'm going to argue that, in fact, Daniel represents to us one great principle. That is the principle of involvement in the world without compromise.

[4 : 16] Involvement without compromise. And I want for a moment to explore those two aspects of this particular subject.

We find, first of all, that Daniel got involved. It must have been, from many points of view, exceedingly uncomfortable.

It was highly demanding. It was something tremendously challenging. And yet, from the very outset, this man stands before us as one prepared to get into the society.

He is not at all willing to be simply standing aside. He wants to get in. He wants to be part of the world in which he lives.

For example, he is involved in and identified with its social customs. He accepts a Babylonian name.

[5 : 29] He speaks a Babylonian language. He dresses like every other member of this particular civilization. There is nothing outward that is going to indicate the profound inward difference between this man and the other members of this particular civilization.

Now, it seems to me that there is a constant pressure upon the Church of God to be isolationist, to withdraw from society and to adopt some outward invisible mark of its own distinctiveness and its own difference.

And there have always been and there still are groups of Christians who are to a very large extent withdraw from society.

we have it especially in the Anabaptist tradition in the Amish and Mennonite people of the USA. But it's a tradition that stands close to many traditions of the Christian Church.

There are believers who do rest differently. Believers who don't read newspapers, don't own television sets, don't own motor cars, don't get involved in the world's commerce, in the world's education.

[7 : 10] They stand apart. They criticize its social customs. they abandon the world's technology.

They regard the world as a world which has gone to the devil and must be left entirely to the devil. Now Daniel, I suggest, is a symbol of a very different kind of policy.

A symbol of a willingness to be involved. A willingness even to exploit. A willingness to stand with the pagan neighbor in commerce on the shop floor in the factories.

A willingness to avail oneself of the contemporary technology to try to influence the world in which one lives through the technology.

If we go back for example to the 16th century, surely one of the most important decisions made by the church at that time was a decision to use the printing press.

[8 : 35] And by means of it to unleash upon the world a torrent of pamphlets which set forth the glories of the Reformation Gospel.

There was in that day a revolution in communications. And the church of the time was prepared because it was led by men a vision and was prepared to use that revolution in the technology of communications.

Surely the same way today we have to stand with modern man in his own enterprises in common grace.

We must stand with them in his commerce we stand with them in his industrial quest we stand with them in his technology and we shall explore and exploit for his evangelization every tool and every technique which God in his providence has given to us.

Daniel is a symbol of that. He will speak their language and he will stand with them. Martin Luther did the same.

[10 : 00] He will speak the language of his people give them God's word in their language. He would use their technology he'd get involved in their aspirations and in their problems and that surely is still God's will for ourselves.

It involves constant and daily contact with a great deal that is defiling we stand with the world's duplicity with the world's double standards we stand with the world's fornicators with the world's ambassadors with the world's practitioners of all the dubious arts of contemporary commerce.

But there is no way we can avoid that without going out of the world itself. We have been sent into that world. We must be part of it in order to function as its salt and as its light.

It is God's will that one should be involved. No, I'm not saying that God permits it. I am saying that God mandates it.

I am saying that God acquires it. That I go through this terrible process of going into that world in all my vulnerability in all my ineptness in all my incompetence in all my openness I must be in.

[11 : 35] I must be conscious of the risks but I have no right not to be in it. I must stand with my fellow man.

I must speak to my fellow man. I must share his sorrows. I must share his problems. I must share his aspirations and I must use his technology.

I must spoil the treasures of his applied signs. I must use them for the glory of my God and for the salvation of his soul.

I must as Moses did, I must spoil the Egyptians. I want us to move in, to move in with confidence that that is God's will, not only God's permission, it is God's directive that his church represented by all its members be dispersed throughout society, be found in every walk, be found at every level of life, functioning in that world as the salt of the earth and as the light of the world.

We find this man therefore involved in the world's social customs, his language, its technology. we find also this man involved in the world's learning, in the world's culture, in the world's education.

[13 : 16] We find, for example, in verse 4, that they are made to stand in the king's palace to be taught the learning of the tongue of the Chaldeans.

we find the same thing in verse 17, as for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom.

We find in verse 20, that in all matters of wisdom and understanding that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all their competitors in the culture of their own situation.

How in many ways that is utterly remarkable. Here is a Jew schooled in all the disciplines of separation, in isolation, that had their own schools, their own language, their own literature, their own religion.

And here by the mandate of God, we find this man from that background catapulted into a totally different situation.

[14 : 29] He is sent to centers of higher learning that are totally inhospitable to his own religious outlook.

He is taught by teachers who have no sympathy whatsoever with the faith of his fathers and he is schooled and disciplined in a curriculum that is totally alien to his own background and one which at many points was a direct variance with the outlook of his own personal religion.

And yet he is there by the mandate of God. God. Though it may be that some of you have found it difficult in recent months to be involved in this kind of situation.

You've had to attend centers of learning where the whole ethos is hostile to your own personal faith.

You have maybe been taught by teachers who are apathetic, who are indifferent, who are scornful, who are hostile of all those things which are most precious to you in terms of your own personal commitment.

[15 : 58] And maybe you've often questioned the very legitimacy of that kind of involvement. Is it God's will that we Christians should be found in that kind of situation?

Now it seems to me part of the great teaching of this chapter that we have God's mandate to get involved and to immerse ourselves in the culture of our own time and place.

And I go on to say this. Down here's attitude attitude suggests. Varys did not simply endure it, did simply go on to gain qualifications.

I believe that he went in with a good conscience. And I believe at last that he came to enjoy it and he came to love it.

I am saying in other words that his commitment and dedication to his work as a student was total.

[17 : 20] It was uninhibited. I am going back if I may dare into the roots of the whole problem. That is that we must say as Christians, as Calvinist and free churchmen, that we have no right before God to be contemptuous of the culture of our non-Christian past and our non-Christian environment.

Daniel could have said to God, Lord, the men who wrote those books were unbelievers. The philosophers who elaborated those great theories, these men were unbelievers.

The scientists who give us those great hypotheses, these men are unbelievers. And therefore, I want nothing to do with them.

I am saying over against that, that by the grace of God, that is, by the common grace of God, there is in that ancient learning a good deal which is intellectually stimulating, which is informative, which is perceptive, which is a valid cultural instrument in the hand of God.

I am saying that in the language and literature of our own nation, in its great classical authors, in its outstanding artists, even in the present cultural decadence, that there is still common grace is reigning.

[19 : 27] And I am even saying that in the aspirations of modern science, in the achievements of modern science, there is again, by the grace of God, a good deal that is not only valid, but it's exhilarating, and it's by the grace of God, a superb monument to the power of the human intellect, to man as made in the image of God.

I am saying this to you, Daniel was mandated by God to immerse himself in the language, literature, and science of his own civilization.

Moses equally was mandated by God to immerse himself in the culture of the ancient civilization of Egypt.

Martin Luther and John Calvin and John Howe and John Owen, Thomas Chalmers and John Wesley.

These were men who were steeped in the language, culture, and science of their own day and their usefulness in the hands of God.

[21 : 06] Their contribution to the kingdom of God on earth was to a substantial degree the result and consequence of that immersion, that immersion in that language and in that culture.

If we come closer to our own day, you'll find a man like Dr. Lloyd Jones whose sermons are so puritanical.

There are no anecdotes, no allusions. There is no evidence at all of human learning. There is no parade of human learning. That's the way it should be.

But that man was steeped in the spirit of the 18th century historically and steeped also in the spirit of the 20th century.

He was a man of his time. He knew its literature. He knew its theology, even its deviant theology, its heretical theology.

[22 : 24] He knew its medicine. He knew its psychology. He knew its philosophy because he was prepared to go in by the mandate of God and to learn the language and to learn the learning of his own particular civilization.

And I'm saying at last that those suitably gifted by God and those called by God have a clear mandate to move into the ancient philosophy of Greece, to move into the literature of Elizabethan England, to move into contemporary philosophy, contemporary science, to move in there in response to God's mandate, to move in as young men and women answerable to God for the judgment of their talents, to move in not for qualifications, to move in not grudgingly, but to move in positively, to move in gratefully, to move in praying God's blessing upon this whole exercise, that it's be a rub off on them in order to their culture and their improvement and the deepening of their minds and the groutening of their outlook.

And I would plead with you that you do not simply move into passing sums, but that you move in to master, move in to grow, move in to experience the thrill and the joy of its discovery and its stimulus, move in for the enrichment of your own heart and life and soul and emerge, if you ever emerge, emerge to dedicate not only what it has given you, but so much more important to dedicate what it has made you, what you are, in terms of sensitivity, in terms of tolerance, in terms of breadth of vision, in terms of creativity, in terms of courage to move in with these things, to enrich the church of Christ and to make your contribution to the advancement of his kingdom.

He moved in to that society, he moved into that learning and that culture, and we find also that he moved into its politics.

you remember that the whole purpose of the exercise was that they might stand before the king. And Daniel submits to all the discipline, he sits what we might call today the civil service examination, and he emerges as the most successful and distinguished candidate in that whole examination, and he becomes a civil servant.

[25 : 46] We find in the third chapter that he progresses from that to a political and decision-making and governmental role, graduates to cabinet office, becomes the country's foremost politician.

Now, again, all I'm going to say is this, that there is the word of God clearly spoken, saying to us that that whole realm is one which a believer may enter with a good conscience and by the mandate of God.

I believe and I accept that politics is the art of the possible. I believe that to a large extent it is a sign of compromise.

I believe that all power tends to corrupt. I believe that absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely.

I believe that it is perilous to be involved in the political game. And I also contend that by the mandate of God we have a right as Christians to be involved.

[27 : 23] A right to be members of the civil service. A right to be members political parties. A right I would say an obligation to play our own role in our own trade union.

Whatever that may happen to be. We cannot in a democracy opt to be apolitical.

we have been given the birth right of political power. The question is not shall we have it.

The question is how shall we use it. I do not believe that all believers have the aptitude for politics even for church politics.

But those who have the aptitude those who have the ambition those who have the skill those who have the charisma that politics require these of men and women have a clear mandate from God from this chapter and from other chapters to be involved to make their own contribution in the political sphere for the enrichment and the amelioration of human life.

[29 : 04] Now surely today the greatest peril to our democracy is the cynicism with which we regard politics and politicians.

the terrible the devastating lack of confidence if not in the system then at least in those who administer it.

And yet is it enough for us as Christians simply to be cynical to be contemptuous to scorn to scoff and to ridicule if we ourselves are not prepared to be even minimally involved are not prepared to express our own point of view to defend our own corner.

are we saying that politics has become so dirty and so corrupt that there is no place anywhere in that sphere for a Christian and are we saying that in order to its redemption in order to its elevation and transformation Christians must be willing to accept must be willing to learn the art of the possible and the skills of persuasion and the skills of leadership and learn maybe above all that inward strength of character that can take the criticism and the flack when things begin to go wrong.

God has told us that the state is his ordinance that government is his ordinance God has told us that it is right for believers to stand like Daniel before the king God has made that absolutely plain and yet there is a very real danger that men of principle men of commitment and men of passion are avoiding deliberately the whole political sphere and if that's going to be so then our democracy has no future unless we are prepared to be involved and prepared to argue for those things which you consider as the fundamental prerequisites of effective government that we should be able to lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and in honor and if there is to be an exodus by

[32 : 29] Christians and by men and women of principle from the political arena then we can have no trust made of and no confidence in the future marked by honor marked by quiet marked by peace and above all we can have no confidence whatever in a future civilization characterized by or even concerned with the great quality of godliness here is a man who got involved he looked like a Babylonian of his own period he had the learning of that civilization and he was involved in the political fabric of that civilization and in all these ways this man is a living model for ourselves but then there is a second side and that is this it is involvement but it's involvement without compromise and

Daniel exemplifies the latter as much as he does the former because he is not only involved but he is involved without compromise and there is so much that one can learn from his attitude in this particular respect you notice for example this what was the fear that controlled him as he moved in we're told in verse 8 he purposed that he would not defile himself that is a great problem Daniel didn't mind the hard work didn't mind the struggle didn't mind the ridicule the opposition the misunderstanding the hostility didn't mind feeling like the odd man out but what he was afraid of was that he would be defiled we have the same fear in the epistle of James we are to keep ourselves unspotted from the world that is a great peril contact with the world can defile it's true of ordinary intercourse with our fellow citizens on the shop floor the office of school staff room it is easy to lose the quality to lose the edge of our own discipleship and it becomes so much worse if we are immersed in the world's secular learning in the world's science in the world's literature in the world's culture and I'm sure it is even worse still in the political sphere again because of its very nature as compromise as negotiation and bargaining it is easy to experience spiritual defilement to have our conscience as dulled to lose our own heavenly mindedness to lose our own priorities as men and women and women for whom to live is Christ to have our social preferences revolutionized as we mix in the providence of God with men and women of intellectual stature of social prominence and then to go back into the church with its ordinary people with its non-intellectuals with its uncultured members and before we know where we are we have the world's priorities and the world's perspectives and the world's ambitions and the world's moral standards and the world's social preferences

I'm not for a moment going to go back on what I said under my first heading I still want the believers involved but I want the believers mindful of the danger of defilement I know that even in my present job involving occasional interaction with the world that even there things are significantly different from my position as a pastor there is far more temptation there is far more of the element of negotiation and compromise and one has to be so tremendously careful that in the concern to understand the world and to relate to it and to cooperate with it one does not get defiled

I have no sympathy with those who are frightened simply of the work it is my fear sometimes that the world standards are in many ways higher in terms of industry than those of the church and that in the world one has to work far harder than one has to work in the church that may all be true but my concern is that we should be frightened of the defilement frightened of being spotted of being polluted of having your faith weakened of having your love dissipated of having your hope lose its vision becoming so earthly minded that is the peril Daniel's fear was that he would defile himself and the next thing we know is this that he went into the situation with a very very clear idea of its perils and of his own approach you see how it is in verse 8

Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself in other words he went in with a strategy he went in with a great set of guidelines a set of governing principles there were certain things he was not going to do he didn't wait until some emergency arose and then tried to work out how to react but he went in with a very very clear set of principles that whatever our calling in terms of the world that is something of enormous importance there is I think a point in human life there are many points where we suddenly face a crisis but my concern for the moment is with the need to be prepared

[41 : 04] I would almost say Daniel had a technology or a technique to guide him in his involvement he tried to foresee some of the difficulties some of the questions some of the dilemmas and he tried to work out beforehand what he was going to do when those dilemmas arose suppose he said to himself I must not eat non-kosher food what will I do he foresaw the difficulty and he had a prepared response now it's imperative for us today to have that same kind of wisdom it's no use walking into a factory situation a political situation a school staff room or a hospital theatre and say to ourselves simply it'll be alright on the night we have to go in with the technology we go in with a clear set of guidelines if we are medics we must know beforehand what our views are on some of the great contemporary medical ethical dilemmas like abortion euthanasia whatever else it may be

I don't want to maximize the degree of dilemma which those situations precipitate but we must have our own point of view we cannot simply move into the theatre and then decide to work out a reaction we must have some principles it's the same on the fact you flow it's the same if you become a sales executive the whole question of the ethics of sales the morality of selling you must have your own mind made up on those fundamental questions before you move in that's what Daniel was he purposed in his heart so far no one had asked him to eat kosher food but if and when the problem arose then he had his ass and that's what I'm saying you have your own purpose in your own heart another intriguing point is this where he drew the line he had given some thought to the probable difficulties and his mind was made up as to where he would draw the line and his mind was this he would draw the line on a question of principle it was forbidden for him to eat certain foods it was morally and spiritually compromising it was unacceptable to eat food offered to idols that was a matter of principle now my fear is this that sometimes we

Christians aren't very good at identifying the point where you draw the line and far too often we cause a fracas over issues which are not matters of principle at all and it is enormously important that you should know how to identify a principle is there a principle at stage not simply a personality issue not simply an issue of what will people think of me if I do it but the question of principle is there a real principle involved I can answer that question for you but I can plead with you not to compromise your effectiveness and your testimony by drawing the line prematurely before the point of principle is reached but

I would also say this it is very interesting that the principle that Daniel does evoke is not a major principle in other words one could say it was a principle but it was a minor principle and yet he draws the line on a point of minor principle it was a real principle but it wasn't an earth shattering principle now I think that both of those things are enormously important there must be a principle but we should often find that if we compromise on the small principles then we are hopelessly compromised when a matter of major principle does ultimately emerge and

I would even argue that had Daniel capitulated on the small principle he would not have had the moral or spiritual strength to stand on that major principle when he was asked to worship the image of Nebuchad Metser very very often if we capitulate on matters of elementary principle which are not monumentally important but yet are matters of principle if we capitulate on those small principles we are in no position inwardly or officially to fight on the major matters you will find very very often that the way of the world is to remind you yes but you did this and what's the difference you ate non kosher food and now you won't bow to the idol what's the difference surely if you did the one you can do the other the world

[48 : 25] I was in that way all the time so you must know your principles and you must be prepared to stand and fight even on matters which although principle are not fundamentally important principles and I would add to this a point which I think is maybe the most important of all and it's this he presented his case reasonably and courteously this is something surely of enormous importance because it's very as Christians to take the view that because the foreman the manager the head master or the consultant or whatever because he or she is a non

Christian therefore somehow we can approach him discourteously we can be contemptuous because this man is blind spiritually this man isn't of our faith this man has no spiritual insight and so we become arrogant we present the fourth commandment arrogantly or the sixth commandment arrogantly we hurl at them the texts of our own religion or the views of our own denomination we say to the man but you don't understand we challenge the man's lack of spirituality we become aggressive we become proud and arrogant and the whole thing becomes not only self defeating but it becomes a terrible compromise of our witness to the grace of the

Lord Jesus Christ but Daniel in verse 8 deals with it so differently he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself he put in his request and that man answered in verse 10 answered very firmly you're asking me to put my life at risk you putting my job on the line you're putting my head on the line and sometimes let's ponder that that the request we make in the name of our religion may be compromising to the one who's going to accede to the request and he goes on in verse 11 Daniel says prove thy servants I beseech thee I beseech thee and let them give us pulse to it and he makes a reasonable case he presents it courteously he beseeches there is humility there is person to person respect for an unbelieving pagan who had shown him much kindness and

Daniel deals with the man along those lines so he consented to them in this matter maybe I have suggested that you are discourteous or unfeeling maybe you resent it maybe my warning is unnecessary so be it well let us simply be so totally anxious that we love our neighbor our pagan neighbor and acknowledge his right to courtesy to humility if he is my superior professionally whatever my profession is I must acknowledge that eminence that superiority and I must work within the social boundaries and parameters which that position dictates so

I'm not arrogant I don't dictate and I don't bully and I don't insult but I request and I reason and I beseech and we see of course the outcome of God intervened and maybe that is the outstanding lesson of this passage in all thy ways acknowledge him and he will direct thy paths we find in verse 17 God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom God you might say took them through their examinations but that wasn't the point it wasn't that the night before the exams they prayed for a miracle that they might pass but that right through their studies

[54 : 19] God gave them knowledge and skill it wasn't swatted up for an examination it was assimilated into the fibers of their personalities God gave it to them and in the same way as God did that for them God delivered them from the moral dilemma presented by the non-cauter food and that is a challenge get involved avoid defilement and when you say look that paradox that combination is impossible then I say in all thy ways acknowledge him and he let act thy paths it is

God's mandate to be involved I have no right not to be involved it is God's mandate that I must not defile myself I have no right to defile myself I acknowledge God in getting involved I equally acknowledge God in avoiding defilement and I expect God by his grace to help me straddle the two lines of that paradox so that by his grace I can be usefully in the world I can assimilate much in it that is righteous and true and lovely and of good report and I can equally by God's grace avoid all in it that is compromising and polluting may God help us to involve ourselves without compromise let us pray oh lord we ask thy blessing to help us understand thy word and to help us organize our own lives in the light of its principles help us to be involved preserve us pollution give us oh lord the wisdom we need from day to day to make your way through the tensions arising from that paradox for Jesus sake amen

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