

What doesn't change, no matter what?

Daniel 1

Elisabeth Elliot was twice widowed. First by the martyr death of missionary Jim Elliot; then by the death of her 2nd husband, theologian Addison Leith. Elliot tells how helpful the Apostle's Creed was to her during her mourning the loss of Dr. Leith. "I used the Apostle's Creed to answer this question: What things have NOT changed even though my husband has died?"

This lesson, We might want to consider Daniel and his friends, after being hauled off to Babylon in 605, far away from Judah and all that was near and dear and clear, asking a question – sort of the same question Elizabeth Elliot once asked. In fact, we would *all* do well to ask this question:

"In spite of what is happening to my country and to me, what has NOT changed?"

The Text of *Daniel 1* answers the question: **GOD!**

GOD has not changed; God is still there, wherever "there" is. In fact, the message is:

God is **SOVEREIGN** even in the context of the most **oppressive** circumstances of our lives! We see this sovereignty of God repeated in 3 Vv in *Chapter 1: 2, 9, 17*. So HOW is God sovereign?

What goes on in our lives can be likened to a **COIN** with **2 sides**: Divine Sovereignty / Human Responsibility



(cf Proverbs 16:33; Acts 2:23) WE PRESBYTERIANS EMBRACE BOTH SIDES OF THE COIN, AND NEITHER TO THE EXCLUSION OF THE OTHER!

Let's consider both sides of this "coin" as we examine what's happening in Daniel 1.

1. God is SOVEREIGN in His JUDGMENT of UNFAITHFUL People. (Vs 2)

- **What happened? (Divine Sovereignty)** GOD gave Judah over to the Babylonians! God is actively sovereign in this event! Yahweh directs the history of ALL nations! And God is SEVERELY FAITHFUL to what He says He's going to do (Leviticus 26:33, 39; Isaiah 39:6-7). When we disobey, God is FAITHFUL to make sure we are CHASTIZED when we disobeyed. Otherwise, He's an indulgent & unjust God!
- **What happened? (Human Responsibility).** The leaders of the country of Israel joined in alliances with nations hostile to their God. 3 words: COMPROMISE, TOLERATE, and ASSIMILATE. The leaders both religious AND governmental chose to COMPROMISE w/the enemy and to TOLERATE and ASSIMILATE the lifestyle choices of those whose choices would be totally at odds with the MORAL REVELATION of God's Law. Can we say IRAN? Can we say SUPPORT of "alternative lifestyles" (wonder how many professing Xn church members watch Catlin Jenner show and slowly assimilate in their minds the propaganda of secular talk-and-news shows? And how many professing XNS and XN MINISTERS have logged onto Ashley Madison?)

A HISTORICAL EXAMPLE of where the church relinquished Her responsibility to the secular government and paid (is paying) the price for giving up what THE CHURCH was supposed to do... HEALTH, EDUCATION, & WELFARE.

How do the enemies of God see their "victory"? As a victory over our God. **When the people who claim to serve the Lord are "losers," then their GOD is seen as a "loser"**. The fact that Judah fell into the hands of the Babylonians meant to them the God of Judah was UNABLE to protect them. [Sort of like the Olympics. If an athlete representing a nation loses an event (100 meter dash), we say that nation "lost" the event. Kenya lost. Germany lost. The USA lost. There IS an identification.] And when we compromise and are taken over culturally by the enemies of God, THEY see it as a reflection of the "God" we serve. We represent God. And, when we disobey and God's enemies take over, the GOD we represent is given bad press. WE represent GOD – when we take a stand, AND when we compromise. God is willing to allow His Name to be shamed so He might wake up his people to what they have done to His reputation.

2. God is **SOVEREIGN** in how we live out our **CONVICTIONS**.

(Vs 9)

- **WHO made Daniel and his companions (and us) the way they (and we) are? (Divine Sovereignty) GOD did!** GOD gave them the status, looks, brains, and “presence” to be picked for Babylon’s Civil Service Corps. God sovereignly places His people in positions of prominence and leadership. AND . . . God SOVEREIGNLY disposes people to take notice of us and to put us into places of responsibility / places of influence. So, ultimately WE take NO credit for the notice favor we receive from others. We neither toot our own horn or pat ourselves on the back.
- **WHO is responsible for how they (and we) conduct themselves (and ourselves) in the place God has put them (and us)? (Human responsibility)** In our vocations, in our associations, ARE responsible to draw the line, somewhere. People we deal with have set things they do (where we are, what we are called, Vs 7 . . .) And then WE set things WE will and will NOT do, Vs 8 . . . It’s like a boat in the water. A Christian living in our culture culture is like a boat in the water. Boat = Xn / Water = Culture. The boat can be IN the water, but when the water gets into the boat, game over! So Daniel decides to draw a line @ some point to preserve the DISTINCTIVENESS God’s people need to have, in contrast to the fallen world around them. Daniel knows he cannot allow himself to be squeezed into the Babylonian mold of expectations. We need to know that, too. We must draw the lines and make the distinctions necessary to preserve our identity as Xns. And it begins with small convictions, which fortify us to make bigger convictions later.

HOW are we responsible to “live out” our Christian convictions? With wisdom, savvy, and sensitivity. Daniel does NOT throw a hissy fit and complain about how “insensitive” the Chief Of Staff is! Daniel’s not being stubborn & pigheaded & “up in your grill” here. There’s “resistance” offered by Daniel, but with a note of grace. He offers a counter proposal. It’s GOD’S job to be sovereign; it’s OUR job to be reasonable / wise.

(Keller Oxford, Harvard, Yale, and Kristin Powers)

The basic way to handle objections is to sincerely agree with your listeners’ beliefs at some point, but then to question a second, mistaken belief on the basis of the first. It is to say: “Since you believe *this*, why not believe *that*?” This forms an alliance between the Bible and one of the listeners’ own beliefs, which can powerfully move people to accept other things the Bible says. (112)

Keller offers a number of examples of how preachers can build alliances between Scripture and one of the listeners’ beliefs. I’ve summarized these in Table 2, which will be most useful if you read Keller’s entire explanation. My purpose here is to demonstrate how Keller brings the depth of his homiletical mind to bear on the task of preaching to our late-modern age.

Table 2. Since You Believe This, Why Not Believe That?

Based on Tim Keller’s Idea of Forming Alliances Between the Bible and a Listener’s Beliefs (p. 112-114)

A Defeater Belief to Challenge: A Point Culture Says or Assumes	Point of Contact (Christian Response) “Since you believe this”	Point of Challenge (Christianity Continues) “Why not believe that”	The Truth to Proclaim
“Nothing exists beyond the material world.”	Given (and I agree!) that you refuse to believe that the strong should dominate the weak, even though this is part of the natural world - - for examples, wolves eat rabbits - -	-- Why not believe that there is some standard beyond or above nature that is the basis for saying the strong should not dominate the weak?	Indeed, if it is true that the strong should not dominate the weak, there must be more than the material world. There must be a Transcendent standard to which we appeal.
“I cannot accept the authority of the Bible.”	Would you not agree that people want and need <i>personal</i> relationships including a personal relationship with God?	But a truly personal relationship can be true only if God can say things that upset us. Only then will we know that we have a real God and not one created by our imaginations.	The Bible is personal communication from the Triune God. We should welcome the Bible’s authority and not be surprised when it rubs our culturally conditioned sensibilities the wrong way.
“I cannot accept the authority of the Bible.”	We would all agree that no one person or culture has all the answers.	So if no culture has all the answers, the Bible must offend every person’s cultural sensibilities <i>somewhere</i> .	Indeed, the Bible is authoritative and we should expect that it would stretch us at various points.
“I could never accept a God of judgment.”	People agree that we should not perpetuate cycles of violence.	Yet, victims of violence will refrain from violence only if they know God will one-day square accounts.	We can be thankful God is a God of judgment. The promise of his judgment grants us the peace we need to not perpetuate violence even when we have been gravely harmed.

3. God is **SOVEREIGN** in every **BLESSING** we have in life.

(Vs 17)

- HOW is God sovereign here? God GIVES them a divine GIFT.
- HOW are we responsible here? The youths here study, toil, and invest themselves in their schoolwork, their studies, their responsibilities – like we should! We should be the best we can possibly be in whatever we are given to do!

At the end of the day, we must recognize that God's goodness ATTENDS, SURROUNDS, and PROSPERS our work, and GOD is the explanation for whatever success we achieve. We are able to stand before those in authority from a position of strength, but only because God PROSPERS us.

And God's blessing CONTINUES, Vs 21 . . .

The principle: Kingdoms rise & fall, but **GOD'S kingdom (& God's **people**) go on!**

Who was CYRUS? The King of Persia, a kingdom who took down Babylon (Babylon fell; and King Nebuchadnezzar has died . . . Kings die, you know . . .) GOD'S servant is STILL THERE! 80 years old! Like the energizer bunny! Babylon, the hairy-chested brute of the world has dropped with a thud into the mausoleum of history, while little 'ole Daniel, the servant of the Most High God, is still on His feet. Kingdoms rise and fall. God's people go on. God IS sovereign!

NEXT WEEK, WE CIRCLE BACK THROUGH DANIEL 1 TO SEE HOW BABYLON (OUR FALLEN CULTURE) TRIES TO SHAPE US INTO ITS OWN IMAGE!