



Main Point: Let your identity in Christ change you more than your culture.

Key Scriptures: Daniel 1:3-9, 3:1-7, 16-18

Introduction

Today, I want to focus on our culture and the influence it attempts to have on us. I'll admit right off the bat that I have struggled with this at various points in my life. So, if anyone needs to hear this, it's me.

But before we begin, I want to ask you a question...

Would you agree with this statement, 'We live in a culture that often sees what is right as wrong and what is wrong as right?'

I think it is a true statement. Let me give you an example. There have been some parents, maybe even yours, who have placed limits on how their teenagers use their phones. They are concerned and place limits and use accountability tools to protect their kids because there are some really dark things on the internet. They want to shield their kids from the dangers that exist online.

That sounds like a loving and right thing for parents to do on behalf of their kids. But that's not what many in our culture think. Instead, they think parents who do this are weird, disgusting, and abusive.

As a minister to families and teens and the head of my household, I would use different words to describe this style of parenting. Wise. Intuitive. Relational. Intentional. And I think God's Word would agree.

But as we all know, most of the time God's will and the will of our culture do not perfectly line up.

In so many ways like this, in our culture, right is wrong and wrong is right.

Culture says babies in utero are just clusters of cells.

Culture says it's the government's job to teach and parent the children.

Culture says public school coaches should be fired for baptizing their players.

We live in a culture that often sees what is right as wrong and what is wrong as right.

Unfortunately for us though, culture impacts us a great deal whether we want to admit it or not. Culture is not something we can live in and never be affected by.

As a whole, culture has the power to significantly influence major aspects of our lives. We are going to look at three of those areas of our lives today, and I want to try to answer one particular question through our study of God's Word.

As Christians, how should we respond when culture tries to change us?

Now I'm not talking about the good, wholesome changes that culture influences us to make or the ones that don't make a bit of difference in our spiritual lives. I'm talking about the changes we know we shouldn't be making. Changes that go directly against God's Word.

Turn in your Bibles to Daniel 1. We're going to see how God's people responded to negative cultural pressure.

Lesson

The events in the book of Daniel took place about 500 years before Jesus walked the Earth, at a time when the Jews had been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire. Almost immediately after taking power over the Jews, Nebuchadnezzar ordered that several of the young Jewish men and women be brought to serve in his court.

Daniel 1:3-4 (ESV)

3 Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, **4** youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

Beautiful. Skilled. Smart. Those are the types of qualities that culture says give you value. But these are very 'culturally appropriate qualifications' for someone who will be hanging out with a worldly king, right?

Verse 6 tells us the names of some of the young men that were chosen. Let's read,

Daniel 1:6 (ESV)

6 Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah.

Those are very interesting names, right? As weird as these names sound to us, they were very meaningful to the 6th century BC Hebrew family. Hebrew names that end in -el or -ah, make reference to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The God of heaven and earth.

When people in the 6th century BC heard names like that they thought, 'this is a man or woman of God.' And this is one of the first areas we are going to see where culture tries to change us, our identity.

Culture will try to change who we are, but we can't focus on what others think of us, we've got to concentrate on what God thinks.

Daniel 1:7 (ESV)

7 And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Beltshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

So you see, Nebuchadnezzar did not like being associated with people who identified with the God of the universe. So, what did he do? He changed

their names, making a mockery of their Jewish heritage and gave them idolatrous labels instead that highlight the pagan Babylonian culture.

As followers of Jesus, our culture doesn't look to kindly on us. We're stripped of our godly identity and given other labels like intolerant, judgmental, bigots. But you see, like Daniel and his friends, we should not allow our culture to have influence on our identity.

That's exactly what Satan tries to use our culture to do, change us. He wants to give us a different identity, one that stands in complete contrast to the name that God has given us.

Satan thinks if he can just get you to stop focusing on your relationship with God and focus on pleasing others, then he can slowly carve away at that identity God has given you.

How many likes am I going to get? How is my hair today? Will the other kids think my shirt is cool? Maybe they'll like me if I buy lunch for my teammates.

Listen to me very closely when I say this. You are made in God's image. This world does not get the opportunity to have a say in who you are. You are not a product of our culture. You're a product of the Almighty.

We are Christians. We matter. We are a royal priesthood, a holy nation. Called out. Separate and apart. Nothing our culture says or does should be able to change that. The question is, do we let it?

So, how should we respond when our culture tries to change our identity? Focus on what God thinks. Who cares what the world is saying? I want to put my attention and effort into what God is saying.

Let's continue in the passage and see that not only does culture try to change our identity but it also tries to change our convictions.

Daniel 1:5 (ESV)

5 The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king.

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