

Purposed Not To Defile Himself

By Prof. Russell Dykstra

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Daniel 1:8-21
Preached on: Sunday, October 6, 2019

Faith Protestant Reformed Church

7194 20th Avenue
Jenison, MI 49428

Website: www.faithprc.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/faithprc

Our Scripture reading this morning is Daniel 1. Daniel 1. The text for the sermon is verses 8 to the end of the chapter, so obviously we'll not reread that. Pay attention, then, to verses 8 to the end. Daniel 1,

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god. 3 And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; 4 Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. 5 And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. 6 Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: 7 Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.

Now the words of the text start at verse 8,

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. 9 Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. 10 And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king. 11 Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel,

Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. 13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. 14 So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. 15 And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. 16 Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse. 17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. 18 Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. 20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. 21 And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, as we read at the beginning of the chapter, the Lord had given Judah into the hand of Babylon. The King Jehoiakim became the subject of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. One of the immediate consequences of that was that Nebuchadnezzar could do with Judah and with the people as he wished, and he instructed the man who was his right-hand man, Ashpenaz, to select from the children of Israel some of the best young men and children that he could find there. Between the ages of 12 and 20, the word "children" can indicate that wide of a group of ages, and he had to select those who were from the king's seed and from the nobles of Judah and then children who were physically fit and attractive, then who were extremely intelligent and applied themselves in their studies, but also those who would be leaders, who would be able to stand in the house of Nebuchadnezzar and in his palace and be his counselors. He brought them to Babylon and enrolled these covenant children in Babylon's schools. They would be taught there the tongue, language and the learning of the Chaldeans. The goal was to have the best of these men now when they grew up, to become counselors for the king. They would serve Nebuchadnezzar and serve for the glory and the strength of his kingdom of Babylon. To that end, therefore, these four young men are brought there. They have covenant names. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, each one of them significant indicating that their parents loved God, that their parents raised these children in the fear of the Lord.

The book of Daniel is about a conflict between two kingdoms. On the one hand, you have the kingdom of Babylon which represents the kingdom of man, antichrist. On the other hand, you have the kingdom of God. They are in conflict throughout this entire book. Babylon represents the anti-Christian kingdom but it represents the anti-Christian kingdom as that kingdom wants to charm believers, charm those who are in the church, and entice them into the kingdom and have them become regular citizens of the kingdom

of man and to apply their abilities to the strengthening of man's kingdom. That's what Babylon represents.

God calls us to live in the midst of Babylon as Daniel and his three friends did, but to live though we live in Babylon, to be spiritually separate from Babylon. These four covenant youth who were raised in the fear of the Lord, now are surrounded by evil and the rest of the book of Daniel indicates what kind of trouble they would have because they stood for the cause of God as they live in the midst of the Babylon, which is the anti-Christian kingdom.

As they are brought here now and they've not been there very long obviously, they're just introduced into the schools and given their clothes and their home to live in and go to class, but now they face an issue, they have to eat. You would think that the king might at this point demand of them that they do something that clearly indicates they will be faithful to him and not faithful to their God and their people. He might have forced them to desecrate the Sabbath day or do some other evil deed that would be a violation of the commandments of God, but that's not how he worked and that's not how the devil works. He required, he didn't require he set before them something that might seem rather minor, food and drink that was from the king's own table, and that becomes the first conflict between Daniel, his three friends, and the Babylonian kingdom.

We read in verse 8 that "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank." That captures really the theme of this passage, and it also captures what is our calling in the midst of the Babylon of this world. So we take as the theme for the sermon this morning: purposed not to defile himself. Purposed not to defile himself. Notice, first of all, the issue, what is he struggling with, the conflict; secondly, the trial then that he endures; and thirdly, the blessing of purposing not to defile himself.

What was the issue for these four Jewish children or young men? It was a significant one. It might not seem so at first. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were safely enrolled in the king's schools, they had no worries as we said all of their needs were taken care of and now it was evident that this would be a luxurious life. They would be able to eat right off the king's table, the same kind of meat and drink that he had would now be theirs and they could enjoy that for the next three years. But we know that Judah had special laws about what they could eat and what they might not eat. After God led Israel out of the land of Egypt, he gave them many laws, civil laws to govern the country, ceremonial laws that involved worship of God, and then the moral law which is the 10 Commandments which we read here Sunday after Sunday. Part of the civil and ceremonial laws that God gave to Israel governed their whole life, not only but especially now governed what they could eat and what they might not eat. Children, you probably know this, that there were clean animals. God said if you have an animal that has a divided hoof and chews its cud, as for example a sheep or a cow, that God said is a clean animal, and if it does not have both of those characteristics, it is unclean, and anything that is unclean, said God, you are forbidden to eat.

So from our viewpoint, this seemed like perhaps a small matter for Daniel and his three friends, the ceremonial laws of Israel that serious-minded Jews were still obeying might not seem like much of a conflict, but there's more to it than merely some meat and some wine because behind it is the matter or the principle of separation unto the Lord. Separation unto the Lord. Would they remain in Babylon a separate, that is spiritually separate people of God devoted to him, or would they become as the Babylonians and live their life?

Israel was the covenant people of God, the covenant people. Eternally they were the chosen nation and the elect among them were loved of God and they formed the very core of the nation of Israel. Israel became the chosen possession of God. He redeemed them in a typical way, drawing them out of the bondage of Egypt, covering them with the blood of the Passover lamb. They were his own people and God chose to dwell with them. That's the essence of the covenant, friendship with God, living with him in covenant fellowship. That's what the temple represented in Israel. But because God chose to dwell with them, they must be holy. God stresses that in so many ways. One of the passages where we see that is in Exodus 19:6, just the chapter before the law, you recognize. In Exodus 19:6 God said, "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." This was required of them.

Now holiness involves two things. On the one hand, holiness is separation from sin, separation from everything that would defile them, therefore they had to be separate from the heathen who were ungodly, and from their idols. Separation. Holiness means separation from. In the second place, holiness means consecration to, that you are devoted to God, consecrated to him. That's your life. That's holiness. God therefore gave them laws that were designed, first of all, to remind Israel that they were a separate people, and then to help them to remain a separate people. That's what the purpose of the laws was. To us it might seem arbitrary, in a sense it is, these are clean animals, these are not clean animals. We eat the unclean animals today so there isn't anything wrong with the animal but God gave these laws to remind Israel that they were a separate holy people, and to keep them separate from the nations around them.

That began at birth with circumcision. Circumcision was a sign of the covenant and it separated Israel from all the nations around them. Anyone who was uncircumcised was a heathen, obviously not a member of the covenant of God but opposed to him.

It went on to marriage. God absolutely forbade anyone of Israel marrying a heathen man, a heathen woman. You are to be separate from them as you are a holy people.

The laws for the priests were even stricter and as we read there in Exodus, "You are a nation of priests to me." Now look at the priest and recognize that's what you really ought to be from a spiritual point of view, pure and holy and consecrated unto God.

Then sometimes God would raise up Nazirites who would have never cut their hair and they would drink no wine or strong drink and never touch anything dead, as a reminder of the fact that Israel, you are to be Nazirites, you are to be holy, separate unto the Lord.

That's not all, it gave them other laws that reminded them of this. "You are not," said the Lord, "to sow within one field two different kinds of seeds. Don't mix anything like that." Even in the things that they wore, their clothing, they must not mix wool with linen. Be separate. There is an antithesis, there is a line that separates and God is reminding Israel, and with that came the laws for food.

In Exodus 11, we read specifically of what God said about their food. Leviticus 11, beginning at verse 43, "Ye shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creepeth," talking about eating, "neither shall ye make yourselves unclean with them, that ye should be defiled thereby. For," this is the reason, "For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves," that's holiness, "sanctify yourselves and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I am the LORD," your God, "that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy as I am holy." So the whole matter of food might seem inconsequential until you recognize it's part of this plan of God to keep his people separate from the ungodly and consecrated to him. That's why they must not mingle, must not intermarry, must not eat as the heathen and with the heathen. This is what Daniel and his three friends now faced and he purposed not to pollute, not to defile himself with this food.

How would he defile himself? Well, first of all, the food, some of it would clearly be unclean, that which God forbade Israel to eat. By eating their food, he would then be saying, "I will not be separate from the Babylonians. I will become as one of them. I will eat what they eat and ignore the laws of God and become a citizen of Babylon and be as they are."

Not only that, but he would have defiled himself with idol worship because it was the common practice that when a meal was made, part of the meat would be offered to the idol god, some of the wine would be poured out to the idol god, and by that it is, number one, indicating that this is the god that gave it to us so we're saying thanks, and then secondly, it's consecrating the meal to this idol, consecrating it to this idol god. To partake of the meal would therefore be to partake of their idolatry. Polluted Daniel and his friends would be.

Now keep in mind what we said at the introduction, that Babylon represents the kingdom of antichrist, that the kingdom of antichrist is not ordinarily immediately come with a sword and say, "Now you have to worship my god or I'll put you to death." That's not the way the kingdom of Babylon does it. The kingdom of Babylon comes with enticements, with incentives. It presents a beautiful view of what it is to be a citizen of the kingdom. Here are the benefits. Here are the joys. Here is the fun you can have. Here is all the pleasures you can have. Here's the money. Here's the power. If you come and join us, if you live according to the way we live, you can enjoy all of this that we enjoy.

That's what Babylon comes to the church, with that therefore the goal was to lead Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah to forsake their spiritual isolation and become one with

the citizens of Babylon. Think of the horribleness, though, if they would do this. This was the very reason why the Lord had taken these young men out of Judah, because of the sins of Judah, had given the city of Jerusalem into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. It was exactly because they had intermingled with the heathen; they had taken their daughters of the heathen to their wives, and given their daughters back to the heathen for wives; and they had then partaken in the idolatry of the land and God's judgment, therefore, came upon Judah because they were living this way. And now Daniel and his three friends would be agreeing with idolatry, exactly seeing the judgment of God on the church in that day, now they're going to go ahead and do the same things? They couldn't.

This would be the first step into Babylon, becoming one with them, small as it might seem at first. Understand that the principle is exactly there for us, the principle of being holy, being separate. The church is the peculiar possession of God. The church, that's his covenant people. We have the sign of the covenant sprinkled upon our foreheads in baptism. We have the Lord's Supper, a meal of fellowship with God which only believers have the right to, fellowship with God at his table. We are a purchased possession.

1 Peter 2:9 says about the church, "ye are a chosen generation, a peculiar people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation." That's what we are, God's separate people. But the church lives in the world. We are surrounded by the world. No longer is the church like Israel in the Old Testament, a separate nation that would then live in isolation from the others and they could have guards and keep the other people out and be a separate people. That's not the way God calls us to live today. We don't build us a holy city. We don't go off and establish a little province by ourselves. We don't have monasteries where only believers are allowed. We live in the midst of the world. We work with the world. We shop with the world. We go to college, we go to college with the world. We live among them but our calling is to be in the world but yet not be of the world from a spiritual point of view.

To live the antithetical life, that isn't just in Old Testament teaching, this is what the Bible teaches us in 2 Corinthians 6, "Wherefore," says Paul to the Corinthians living in a very ungodly city, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Same calling, be separate, touch not the unclean thing. It couldn't be any clearer.

That's the issue we face day by day. How do we maintain our spiritual separation? We have to make choices all the time. Will this compromise the principle if I do this, if I allow my children to do that? Will this compromise the principle that I am to be holy, I am to be separate from sin, I am to be consecrated unto God? That's the trial, that's what we face day by day and that's what Daniel and his three friends were facing concretely in this chapter.

That, of course, trying to be separate, maintaining the principle of purposing not to defile ourselves, will mean there will be trials. There will be trials. Daniel had trials and as Daniel is here, it seems that pretty much everything is against him. The food is placed in front of him, a clear violation of God's command it would be to eat, but how can you

escape that? How could they escape that? Consider their position. They are captives. They are captives. They've been taken away from father and mother, father and mother are far far far removed. Their parents will never know if they eat this or not. They'll never know and they might even think, "Well, would dad and mom rather that I starve or would they rather that I eat?" Quite a question, what would my mom and dad want me to do? They have a very tenuous position. They may be the best and the brightest but they are still captives of the Babylonians and they are young boys, probably in the range of 12 to 15 years old and food is a necessity. You have to eat. You have to drink to stay alive. So there would be this obvious strong appeal to the flesh, here's food, there isn't any other food, so this must be what I'm required to eat. It would be easy, then, for them to reason, "Well, it's death or it's eating this food. Clearly we eat."

And add to that, that all around them were fellow Jews, Jews that would have been raised in Jerusalem, Jews who had been, they had heard all of these laws about eating and what you wear and the whole of your life and circumcision and all of these laws that they knew all of these things full well, and when the food is set in front of them, they're eating without hesitation, they're eating and drinking and enjoying the food of the king. And if Daniel would have asked them, as he perhaps did, "Do you think it's right for you to eat this food, the food that may have been offered to idols? The food that has uncleanness in it?" They probably would have looked at him as if he was crazy, "This is the best food in the world. We never had anything like this and now you want to be a vegetarian?" The fact that it didn't bother the others would have made the trial even more difficult for Daniel and his three friends.

Nonetheless, they purposed in their heart, "We will not defile ourselves." So the first thing they did is they asked the head man, the prince of the eunuchs, if they might have some other kind of food, and his answer should have put terror into their hearts because when they asked, his answer was an unqualified, "No, there is no chance of that." And then he said, "That if I would give you different food and you would turn out sickly," that the king would be angry and he said, "Why then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king?" Well, understand if the head of the eunuch was in danger of the king for this disobedience, what would it be like for Daniel and his three friends? They had no standing with the king. He would have no mercy if he would, if they would disobey.

At that point, this was a trial. That itself, that answer is a trial because at that point they could have said, "Well, you know, we tried but it didn't work. Alright, I guess it's obvious the Lord's will is we better just eat." But no, they didn't conclude that. They purposed in their heart not to defile themselves and so they persevered. They sought Melzar, the man who was their immediate server and asked him if he would give them some different kind of food rather than the king's meat and they got him to cooperate, and day after day for three years, every meal was water and vegetables. Water and vegetables. Water and vegetables for three years. That's what they ate. It's quite possible that they were mocked by the other captives, "What? Are you too good to eat with us? Are you holier than we are?" But they persevered. Water and vegetables.

So it is with us, is it not? Life is filled with countless conflicts that involve the principle of spiritual separation from the world. It begins at birth. At birth the world will offer all sorts of programs for you and for your children. If you don't have enough money, they'll give you welfare. If you need daycare because mom wants to go off to work, "We have to eat, after all," so if mom has to go off to work, well, then we'll give you daycare if you can't afford that. They will feed you. They will clothe you. They will educate you. And that continues all through life. There are always decisions that you have to make, "Will this compromise the principle? Will this compromise the principle?"

As our children get older, we set rules for them, rules for Sabbath observance, rules for entertainment, rules for how they are to dress, and we're always wondering how's the principle of spiritual separation to be applied in these various areas of life? A little television maybe, does that compromise the principle? It's just innocent cartoons, just a comedy, drama. It's just innocent fun. As the children get older and they have greater freedoms and they have friends over and, well, you hear some music that maybe is not the best music, but at least they're home with us and we know they're under our roof and they're not doing anything really bad. These things can seem so small and yet we need to be facing the question: are we compromising the principle of spiritual separation?

It's so easy to lose track of that because it is a constant battle to be spiritually separate, not to follow the world, not to follow their idols. All their sports activities, and I'm not saying that sports is something that would fit into the same category of being wrong, but they welcome our children. You can play soccer with us, of course. You can play baseball with us. You can play basketball with us. Whatever, it doesn't matter. They'd love to have us join them and we have to maintain, and I'm not saying that you have to keep your children out of it, but you do have to maintain the principle of separation. It's not physical but it is spiritual. It's real.

Having television in the home is a very very difficult thing to keep this principle. The dramas of the world and who doesn't feel totally out of it when they're a teenager sitting at work in the break room and everybody is talking about the television programs and they look at you and, "I don't watch that." What?

And so it is with rock music and country music and getting involved in the sports world and devoted to the sports teams that the world follows, there are their idols, there are their heroes and they want us to join with them and enjoy them. They want us to enjoy that and our flesh says, "Well, of course, that's what I want to do." They have our young adults look for careers, for jobs, and here too it's very easy to give into the world. You can have this wonderful job but it only is just a once in a while a Sunday, or it might require a labor union, but it's a great job. And really now, of course, it's not so hard. Many jobs out there but there comes times in the history of this country when there have been few jobs and you got a choice of unemployment or a labor union job. Or here's a great job but it's, well, yeah, it's 300 miles away from the church.

These are trials. These are trials that God puts into our life. It would be so easy to simply go along, to go along with it, enjoy what they're offering you. There don't seem to be any

penalties here. I can enjoy it and still come to church on Sunday. I can still worship. That's exactly the way the world works. Always the small things trying to get us to go along, to be a citizen, a part of the kingdom of Babylon.

Now I realize in this area, of course, legalism is an issue and we have to be very careful here. Legalism means that I make a rule for me and for my family, and you better follow that same rule. No, that's not what this is talking about. Daniel purposed in his heart, his heart, "I will not defile myself," and that's the way a father and mother and the children need to look at it that way too. I purpose not to defile myself. I'm not gonna judge other people. I'm not gonna make rules for other people. But I have to stand before God and make decisions because God tries us with this.

When God tries us, it's not that he is unsure what you will do. He knows your heart and he knows, in fact, what will happen in the future. He knows. But he sends trials for our sake and what those trials do when we face concrete situations of whether or not to go along or to say, "No, this is something I may not do," this will bring to light what is hidden within us. God has worked in us by his powerful grace and we can be quite unaware of the tremendous power that God has worked in us until we face a trial and that trial will bring out what's hidden there, what God has worked in us, the power of his grace.

At the same time, God has in mind by that trial to strengthen us. You go through something hard, you go through a battle, you fight against it, and as you come through it you become spiritually stronger. Your faith is purified by the fire of adversity and by simply living according to the word of God you are becoming stronger. God is strengthening us and God causes us to know you stand only by the power of grace. You do not stand because you're Protestant Reformed. You do not stand because your parents gave you a good Christian education. You stand only by the power of his grace. That's it. God desires that his power, his grace, be manifest, be manifest to us, be manifest to each other and be manifest to the world so that the glory of God will be revealed here. It's his power that makes his people to live antithetically in the midst of a godless world.

It's his power so he tries us and, again, it brings out what is hidden within our hearts, and that's what's so frightening about giving in. If we give in to the world, if we go along with the world, what's in our hearts? All of the corruption and the vile iniquity that yearns after the things of this world, that doesn't want to be laughed at or ostracized, wants to fit in. That's what comes out.

We think this is so small, why bother your head about it? It's nothing. I'll know when the really important task comes, when the task comes that this is the doctrine and it's clearly a false doctrine, I'll know I have to stand for the truth. Or when they come and say, "You have two choices, you can bow down to this idol or you can be put to death," I'll know then, that's when I have to stand. But the frightening thing is that a trial brings out what is hidden within our hearts. If we give in, if we give up our spiritual isolation and join with the world now, when the consequences for not going along with the world are really insignificant, you don't have to suffer a whole lot today if you just say no. Granted if you

go to college, you're gonna have a little more ridicule and trouble there at Grand Valley, I know. But generally it's not a huge thing, a little mocking. But then how will we stand when the consequence is death? If we cannot stand now when the consequence is merely somebody laughing at us, ostracizing us, how will we stand when the consequence is death?

The history of the church in Daniel's day bears this out. Daniel and his three friends were only required at this point to say no to food and drink that would defile them, and they could eat water and vegetables for three years. The rest of the Jews didn't bother their head about it. Down the road just a couple of chapters, Nebuchadnezzar will set up this huge image, how many of those Jewish boys that were partaking of the king's meat and drink stood up and refused to bow to the image? Not one. Not one. Only Daniel, rather Daniel wasn't there but Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, they stood up and refused to bow before that image.

There is a relationship because the trials strengthen us and when we stand by the grace of God, when we stand by the grace of God, he gives more grace for greater trials, and that's the blessing. God's blessing rested upon their obedience, emphatically on those who do all in their power to maintain this principle of separation from sin in the world. You can see this in Daniel's life. First of all, the blessing is God gave them a way out. He gave them a way out. He caused the prince of the eunuchs, first of all, to have favor so they dared to ask him, and then they asked Melzar and God moved the heart of Melzar to go along with the plan, try it out for 10 days, see what happens, and then to do this for three years, give them a separate meal. That's quite a thing. God gave them a way out. We don't know how difficult it would have been for Daniel and Hananiah to choose starvation or eating. How many teenagers here would choose starvation over eating the best food? God did not make them face that great of a trial at this time in their young lives. He gave them a way out. They could yet eat and preserve their conscience.

But God blessed them in another way and the rest of the chapter brings that out. He blessed them with wisdom. In verse 17 specifically it says, "As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams." The evidence of that is in verse 20 that, "in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm." Their wisdom, their understanding, their knowledge was far beyond anyone else, and not merely the students who had been with them in school but all of his magicians and all of his astrologers, all his counselors. They were far beyond. There was no comparison in the kind of wisdom and understanding that Daniel and his three friends had.

Now that's a fitting reward, that's a fitting reward from God because the Scriptures say the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. That's Psalm 111:10 and a number of other places. Psalm 111:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever." Wisdom is making the right decisions. Wisdom is facing the circumstances of life and deciding, "This is the way that I should go. This is the way that will best serve God.

This is the way that will give God the greatest glory." We need wisdom day after day to make these hard decisions about spiritual separation.

We need wisdom. God gave Daniel and his three friends wisdom. They feared the Lord. They feared the Lord. They wanted to be faithful to him. They weren't looking for the approval of men. They didn't fear the king's wrath. They feared God and that's the principle, that's the beginning of wisdom. If you fear men rather than God, you will never have wisdom. It's the fear of the Lord, that you love him, that you honor him, that you want to make him to be happy always, never to bring his anger upon you. That's fear of the Lord. Daniel had that and God blessed him with wisdom.

Daniel would need that wisdom, wouldn't he? Living in the midst of Babylon, a counselor to wicked King Nebuchadnezzar, called upon to give advice, called upon to interpret dreams, he would need wisdom and so would his three friends. Imagine if you were a counselor to the President in Washington, DC and how many decisions you would have to make every day, all day, go along with this, not go along with this, speak out about this, not say anything about this. Constantly he needed wisdom and God gave it to him. That's what we have to do, make these choices. Is this the way that will give greatest glory to God? Will God approve of this? Is this in harmony with the Scriptures? Is this in harmony with the principle of being spiritually separate? Many, much wisdom is needed.

Whenever we stand firm and remain spiritually separate, when we hold fast to the promises of God and those promises, remember, are very important here too, the promise is the kingdom of this world will fail. The kingdom of this world will not stand. It's threatening or enticing but it will not stand. The kingdom of God, that's eternal. That's the promise of God. We hold onto that as we stand in the midst of the world and God gives us ways to overcome in our temptations.

The opposite is also true, conform to the world, go along with the world and he will withdraw some of his grace and say, "Do you want to go with the world? Well, go ahead then. Find out what it's like. Live with them." And a child of God can immerse himself in terrible sins that just started out with agreement with the world, living in harmony within.

God gives grace in the way of our standing. That's how he gives grace and he blesses us with all spiritual blessings. In the way of standing for his cause and maintaining spiritual isolation, he gives us assurance of our salvation. He confirms the forgiveness of our sins. He gives us greater strength of faith so that we enjoy covenant life with God.

So we need to take heed to exercise wisdom, to maintain this principle in our homes, in our lives, not to be one with the world. We are redeemed. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We belong to God. We must be spiritually separate from the world, consecrated to our God. You and I must purpose in our hearts not to defile ourselves. Amen.

Let us pray.