

Daniel 1:8 (J. Wilson Smith) 156430

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Daniel is a most encouraging example for young Christians to consider. A captive at the court of the king of Babylon when we first read of him, he must only have been a youth in his teens. The start he got was a good one, for the impetus of it carried him through a very long life, through changing dynasties, and amid many vicissitudes. Some seventy years he served the Lord, sometimes in positions of great prominence, sometimes for years in obscurity.

What marked Daniel's start? He was put to the test while young. He and three companions were chosen to be taught the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans, and thus fitted to take positions of honor and trust in the kingdom. A portion of the king's meat and drink was allowed to them for the three years of their study. Then we read, "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" (Dan. 1:8). The king's portion had doubtless been offered to the idols first, and as such Daniel would have none of it. It was a bold stand to make. A tyrannical monarch might easily have taken it into his head to slay the bold youth, who dared to insult his gods like that and to despise the very food that the king himself partook of.

The Secret of His Heart

What was the secret of his boldness? "Daniel purposed in his heart." His heart was won for Jehovah. His soul revolted against the blind superstition of idolatry, and at all costs he would take his stand. No one can tell how the heart is thus won. We cannot whip ourselves into devotedness. It is well if the young Christian deplores his lack of heart for the Lord and turns to Him in prayer that it may be otherwise. This is a day of great lukewarmness. Laodicea — nauseating lukewarmness — is the last stage in the history of the church of God on this earth, the full-blown result of the first declension in Ephesus, the leaving of first love. It is the appreciation of the Lord's love to us that will alone bring the answering love to Him. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). It is the love of Christ that alone can constrain us to live to Him and not to ourselves.

God's Support

And see how God came in and supported Daniel. God was able to sustain the youthful Daniel in the presence of the proud monarch. We read that God had brought Daniel "into favour and tender love" with the prince of the eunuchs. When Daniel asked that he and his companions might be fed on pulse and water for ten days as an experiment, the prince of the eunuchs agreed to it. Ten days was not a long time for a food experiment, to have much result. But at the end of the ten days the faces of Daniel and his three companions were "fairer and fatter" than those who took of the king's meat and drink. Best of all, when the three years' study was completed, in matters of wisdom and understanding these four were ten times better than those who had partaken of the king's meat and drink. Thus was Daniel justified.

But it all began with the heart. There is no doubt that the heart controls the man. The mind may tell you that such and such a course is not right, but it is the heart that carries the man. It was Barnabas who exhorted the young converts at Antioch "that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11:23). The wise man exhorted his son in memorable words, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

It is a terrible thing when the young believer allows his heart to run after the things of the world. How insidious these things are! How well is it when the heart of the young Christian is set upon the Lord.

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