

The Power of Peer Pressure

1. Defining “Peer Pressure”

A. My definition: “The pressure to conform to a group whose approval and acceptance one desires.”

1. The pressure is based on **fear**: the fear of *rejection*.
2. This pressure is also based on **love**: our love of belonging, companionship, camaraderie.
3. Peer pressure is **powerful**. How powerful? **Illus**: Hazing. College students will subject themselves to abuse, torture, humiliation – even death – to “fit in.”

B. The problem arises when our peers pressure us to conform to something of which God disapproves. Here is the difficulty of being “free moral agent.” Examples:

1. Negative – Saul/Amalekites, see 1 Sam 15:15, 20-21, 24 (“*because I **feared** the people and obeyed **their** voice.*”); the parents of the blind man – Jn 9:22. See also Jn 12:42-43 (“*for they **loved** the praise of men more than the praise of God.*”).
2. Positive – Jeremiah (Jer 26:1-3, 8, 12-15); Jesus (Mt 26:63-68; but contrast Peter’s simultaneous denial outside before his peers – 26:69-75).

C. Who is subject to it? In a word, **everyone!**

1. Young and old alike. While teens may be particularly vulnerable due to their peers’ viciousness, ridicule and taunting (they haven’t yet learned compassion and sympathy), old people are affected as well.
2. Preachers – Temptation to say what others want to hear. Some preachers may preach the “orthodox” position to avoid trouble with editors/debaters.
3. Churches – Afraid to depart from tradition so as not to be “blackballed” or appear out-of-step with other churches.

2. Handling Peer Pressure

A. We must honestly answer this question: Which means more to me? The praise of men or the praise of God? **Indicators**: How do I choose fashions? Who are my closest friends? When is the last time I forfeited something for worship (ball game, concert, school trip)?

- B. We must remember that if we deny Christ in *this* life He will deny us in the *next* – Mt 10:32-33.
- C. Man's approval is fickle and fleeting. **Ex:** Jesus is given a glorious welcome to Jerusalem just *five days* before the crowds ask for the release of Barabbas instead of Him. God's approval, on the other hand, is sure, dependable, and unchanging.

3. Positive Peer Pressure

- A. We can use peer pressure to our advantage by valuing and seeking approval of godly people.
- B. Christians are to be mutually involved in the spiritual affairs of each other – Ph 2:4; 1 Cor 10:24. We must hold each other *spiritually accountable* for our actions. Taken to an extreme this can become hypocrisy, but knowing that others watch over us and care about us can get us over the occasional hump of weakness.
- C. Collective discipline involves positive peer pressure – 1 Cor 5:9-13. The local church says to the offender, "You have no part with us so long as you indulge your sins." See the opposite in 2 Cor 2:5-8.

Observations:

- 1.** The majority is often *wrong*. Truth is not determined by consensus or opinion poll. We must stand for what is right even if we are the *only one*.
- 2.** Men's standards of approval are easier to meet than God's. It may involve wearing the right clothes, flattery, not "judging" the wicked, gross immorality (which meets the approval of many). But God cannot be deceived. It takes *true character* to be approved of Him. See 2 Cor 10:12, 18.
- 3.** We won't answer to men in the judgment – 1 Cor 4:3-5. How good will it feel to hear God pronounce us justified and invite us into eternal glory?!