

#13 “The Futility of Chasing the Approval of People”

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It is no mystery that many of us have suffered hurt or rejection in some way during our lives. For some, the hurt has come from those who should have loved us the most and the best. Thus, their rejection cuts even deeper, leaving wounds that need to be healed by the unconditional acceptance and love of Christ. Until we find our identity and worth solely in who we are in Christ because of His love for us, we will continue to seek our worth elsewhere, typically chasing the approval of others.

It indeed is the natural way of man to constantly seek the approval of others. Teenagers, for example, look to their peers in particular as a means of gauging their own worth. The high school experience is notorious for ranking individuals based upon clique, dress, extracurricular involvement, and smarts. But it doesn't end with high school; in fact, much of life is based upon performance and rank. Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, said, remarking on life in general, “I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind” (Ecclesiastes 4:4). Every labor, activity, and work of man is, in his natural state, based upon competition with others. Man tries to find his worth based upon human rank, performance, or others' acceptance, but this is never going to satisfy or fulfill the void that rejection and hurt has left in his heart. It is like trying to catch the wind.

When we seek the approval of others as a means to garner self-esteem and worth or to establish our identity, we are out of bounds from a Biblical perspective. In chasing the approval of man, *we are trying to find our worth and identity not based in how God values us but in what others think of us*. This is futile, but it is easy to do nonetheless. This is why people glorify and even deify sports stars, Hollywood icons, rock stars, and politicians for example. We constantly live under the illusion of “if only I did this, had this, made this, knew so-and-so, became like so-and-so, and got this, then I would get so-and-so's approval and then I would be happy.” Such is like the ridiculous notion of trying to catch the wind. It can never be done, for it is impossible. In fact, it was ordained and designed to fail. Such is supposed to draw us to the only true source of satisfaction, wholeness, healing, and fulfillment which is Jesus Christ. It is all by God's design.

Hopefully, we have come to the point where we get sick and tired of trying to people-please, worrying about peer pressure, and trying to outdo our neighbor. Hopefully we can see that it is a treadmill that keeps us from ever gaining any ground no matter how hard we work and try. Yet the temptation remains.

John 12:42-43 says, “Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; *for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God*” (emphasis added). The Pharisees held an elite position of power, authority, and respect. They could make the rules, carry out sentencing, and show everyone how spiritual they were based upon their outward apparel and rituals. To be a Pharisee among the Jews was to be at the top of the pecking order. Yet Jesus constantly rebuked the Pharisees for being hypocrites and for missing the essence of the call of a follower of God- love for God and love for their neighbor. Some of the rulers of the Jews did see their error and come to faith in Christ, yet because of appearances and the love of man’s approval, they did not confess Him. They knew that if they confessed their belief in Jesus publicly that they would probably be relieved of their positions in a public display of shame and ridicule. They would likely lose everything, be oppressed, struggle to find work, bring shame to the family name, and potentially endanger their own well-being as well as that of their own families. Some were not willing to give up all of the comfort, show, and “security” of the things of the world for the sake of Christ. They loved the approval of man rather than the approval of God. In other words, it is either one or the other. If we follow God and love Him with all of our hearts, then we must recant our allegiances and compromises with trying to impress others, trying to boost our own self-esteem through making earthly comparisons, and trying to achieve what only God can give. It might be as simple as not wanting to be seen praying because of the ridicule other students or co-workers would bring. Loving man’s approval might also lead us to never avoid risking rejection that might accompany sharing the gospel with a stranger or a loved one. But if we love God we must deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him, even if it means that we are rejected by family and friends.

Paul lost all and counted it joy for the sake of knowing Christ. He would rather enjoy the fellowship of Christ, even if it was fellowship through suffering, than continue to live as an elitist Pharisee of the Pharisees. Paul had it all, having been trained by the best of the best when it came to the teachers of the Law, Gamaliel. Paul, in terms of the rivalry of human nature, had won. He had arrived. Yet upon encountering Christ, he left all the rank, status, and competition behind and became one of the least (Philippians 3:7-8). Identifying with Christ was not an impressive societal mark; being a Pharisee was. Yet Paul chose Christ even though it meant certain persecution, ridicule, and likely death. Paul valued the eternal over the temporal, understanding that in the life to come the last shall be first and the first shall be last (Matthew 20:16). Thus, he rightly understood that seeking God’s approval is always worth it in the long run.

Choosing to identify with Christ often will cost us something. However, it is an identity worth having because He will never reject us or cast us out if we are His children. It is a relationship not of competition but of love, grace, and mercy. It is a place of safety, joy, hope, and kindness. Only in Christ can we find healing from rejection and grace to be who Christ has created us to be.

Let us stop chasing the wind and seeking the approval of man. It is time that we desire God’s approval more than mere man’s, for only God’s approval matters and carries any

eternal weight whatsoever. So, do we want to please God more or man? That is the question that we must answer.