

“WISDOM FOR RESISTING PEER PRESSURE.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for Sermon: Proverbs 1:8-19; 12:26; 13:20; 29:25

Introduction.

A reporter was interviewing a 104-year-old woman. He asked her, “What is the best thing about being 104 years old?” She answered, “No peer pressure.”

I guess there is that to look forward to. But before then peer pressure is a constant source of trouble in all our lives. We tend to think peer pressure is a teenage sport but the truth is it is a default mode in all our hearts. We are predisposed to it from the beginning. Adam fell into it with his one and only peer.

The words peer pressure isn’t in the Bible, it has another name. It is called the fear of man.

Scripture describes our spiritual life and experience as two paths, two roads we can walk, the fear of the Lord and the fear of man.

The fear of man doesn’t mean we are afraid of people like we are afraid of spiders and snakes.

The fear of man is a lifelong temptation that can be described as the desire to belong, to be accepted, to gain something by going along with others, to not be on the outside looking in.

The fear of man is the fear of losing others favor, love, or friendship. The fear of man is *the* influence a group or an individual exerts over us that leads us to change our values, appearance, choices or behavior to conform to a group or someone else’s norms.

The fear of man makes an idol out of approval, acceptance, and that leads to anxiety, self-doubt, paralysis in decision-making, and compromise of personal

convictions by going along with the crowd, with the majority, with popular opinion.

Teenagers don't have a corner on this market, it is real for all of us adults, for married couples, retirees and widows.

I may be showing my fear of man when I check my appearance in the mirror, monitor my likes on social media, rerecord voice messages to sound better, obsessively replay conversations in my mind, compare my life with others', compare successes, finances, accomplishments, vacations, make purchases thinking about what others will think, fantasize about greatness, exaggerate my successes, or downplay my failures. Anytime I am letting someone "pulling my strings".

There are plenty of examples in the Bible and they are all adults.

Twice Abraham succumbed at the expense of his wife, calling her his sister. And if that wasn't bad enough, his own son Isaac followed his poor example. Aaron yielded to the people's demands and made the golden calf (Ex 32:1–6). King Saul "was afraid of the people and gave in to them," (I Sam 15:34). Peter, who loudly declared he would never betray Jesus, caved in to a little servant girl's questions around a fire.

And even in his Christian maturity he did it again when some Jews were watching his behavior with some Gentiles, fearing criticism (Galatians 2:11–14).

Pilate condemned Jesus to satisfy the crowd (Mark 15:12–15).

John 12:42-43 Many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

Brothers and sister, is there a power or influence more dangerous to our spiritual and physical life and wellbeing than this pressure to conform and bow to the fear of man? Let's look at Proverbs for help to understand it and for help and hope to combat it.

Proverbs 1:8-9 Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, 9 for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.

First, we hear the value and importance of the family and of the influence of parents in children's lives for their good. This underscores the value and importance of parents having an active, intentional role in helping children know that is true and good, and what is not true and good.

Notice this proverbial wisdom is not just to say no and to give warnings, it also makes clear what the rewards are of walking in wisdom. Children will be wise to listen to the loving, wise counsel of parents that it might go well for them in life.

10 My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.

When Satan rebelled against the God who made him, he became an influencer. We hear about the influencers on social media, those who have tens of thousands of followers and exert great influence on how people think, what they do, what they wear, what they watch and sing.

Satan was the first influencer and he has more followers than all the other influencers put together. Satan is a tempter and he has raised up millions of disciples to help him in his work, sinners who tempt us, who entice us, who lure us into following them and their ways.

Sinners who entice us are doing Satan's work. Our battle is never with one, but with many.

Don't be fooled by the conditional clause, if sinners entice you. It is no uncertainty. ***When*** sinners entice you, and they will again and again. They did yesterday, they will again tomorrow. I have been and I will be again.

Every TV commercial, every social media influencer, people in every group you are a part of, school, work, social gatherings. Satan is unrelenting, and his method is through friends, or friends of friends, or even strangers. You are being and will be enticed.

Do not consent. Resist for the sake of your life, your soul.

Eve consented before she ate. David consented before he sinned against Bathsheba.

Joseph resisted fiercely against Potiphar's wife and saved himself.

Job resisted all his friends and did not sin.

Remember, Satan cannot force us to sin. He exerts influence and subtle tricks and deceit and lies, by the smallest and least obvious or innocuous of enticements, but it will always be our own willful choice to sin.

Proverbs 1:15-16 ..my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths. 16 for their feet run to evil.

Don't think you are smarter than Satan and his devices or his schemes. Don't think you can play with fire and not be burned.

Don't think you can walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, and not end up sitting in the seat of scoffers (Psalm 1).

You will get lots of invitations packaged as friendship, as acceptance, don't even go a little way, hold back your foot, before your whole body and soul ends up on the wrong path, doing things you never thought you would do. What am I tempted to sacrifice in order to be accepted?

I Corinthians 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."

Sins are like dominos, the first one seems small, and well, it is only one, but the one leads to another and another. The slippery slope is hard to stop. Sin always recruits. Sin always loves company, always multiplying.

"Do not walk ... hold back." Refrain. He repeats himself with earnest. This is as a father pleading with his son. Don't take that first step. Satan makes his paths look so smooth and lines his paths with flowers, but he never lets us see the end.

Your only safety is to flee, to run the other way. Don't be proud, thinking you are different or better than everyone else, that you can resist. Run. If you trust in yourself you will fall.

Proverbs 13:20 Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

The question before us is not whether we will be influenced or not. The only question is by whom we will be influenced. Who will stamp their image on us? Who will leave their mark on us? Will we be a companion with the wise and become wise like them, or will we be a companion of fools and suffer from their folly?

Who can spend time in the company of the wicked and not become polluted? How long can we be in the world before becoming worldly?

Ephesians 5:11-12 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.

II Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.

The fear of man is a snare, which teaches us two important truths: the sin of the fear of man relies on disguise, on subtly, being hidden, and it intends to harm us, it is deadly. That is the point of a snare or a trap, to catch us unawares and to hurt us.

This trap has snared countless millions of souls. This snare has caused people to lose control of their life, to no longer be the master of their life and destiny. This snare causes us to turn over our lives to someone else or to others. We do what they want us to do so we can win their approval, their respect, their affirmation, their affection, their likes.

Think about how much of your life and choices and decisions even on a day-to-day basis are governed by what others might say or think. Think about those people in your life who are most influential on you. Why does what

they think matter so much to you? How would you feel if you lost their approval, respect, favor?

The opinion and approval of others is a cruel tyrant and submission to them is bondage, slavery.

Look at how powerful this is in the fashion industry. Some godless fashion designers in New York City or Paris decide what the new fashion should be and soon everyone is bending the knee and bowing to it. Even it means ripping holes in designer jeans. Even it means betraying our Christian standards of modesty.

Do you ask “what will my friends think of me” or “what is the right thing to do?” Let’s face it, it is hard to go against the tide, to swim against the current of the culture, to be left standing alone.

Where are the men like Athanasius in our world. When he stood up to a heresy that was corrupting the early church, he was exiled and told, “Athanasius, the whole world is against you.” “Then, it will have to be Athanasius against the world.”

Who has the courage to stand up against the majority, against the crowd, to stand alone? How many of us are afraid of being too Christian, of loving Jesus too much, of professing our faith too openly? How many of us try to keep it on the down low, play it safe with our faith?

But whoever trusts in the Lord is safe

Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who fears sin.

Fear your fear of man, by fearing man less and fearing God more.

Safe implies a high place, a strong tower, a place of safety, strength, refuge, safe from danger.

Our safety is found in our faith. Faith sets us free from hearts held captive by others, and enables us to say no. Faith gives us strength, courage, boldness, power to resist evil and the evil one.

Faith gave Peter and John the strength and boldness in the face of punishment to say to the authorities, “we will obey God rather than man.”

Gospel, our identity in Christ.

Peer pressure is ultimately a question of “Whose approval matters most to me? Whom do I fear, whom do I trust, and whose voice will I listen to?”

The Gospel answers all those questions. In Christ I already have all the approval and acceptance I need. Jesus makes my identity, my self-esteem, my confidence secure in my relationship with Him. I don’t need your approval and acceptance, I am safe and secure in Christ, and that sets me free to love you without needing to try to gain something from you.

You are created in the image of God, you are adopted as a child of God, you are filled with the Spirit of God, you part of the family of God, you bear the title Christian, you are an heir of salvation, you have an eternal inheritance in heaven, you wear the robe of Christ’s righteousness.

You have the highest privileges, the richest honor, the greatest blessings, so why would we ever entertain for a minute sacrificing that for the approval of man and the fear of man. Who in their right mind would trade heaven for hell?

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Our ultimate security comes from what our Father says about us, not from what others say about us (or even what we say about ourselves). Our identity and acceptance are ultimately found in Christ which sets me free from needing the approval of other people.

The most important gift parents can give to your children is the confidence that their greatest worth and value is not in their physical beauty or intelligence or athleticism but in knowing Christ. This will give them the power and courage to say no to the pressure to conform to peers.

Put an end to all comparisons about who is better or worse, or are they measuring up. Look up. Make sure your kids find their acceptance at home

and in Christ. Make sure your expectations of them are Gospel centered and so they don't have to search for acceptance somewhere else.

And give them examples from your own life of not compromising your faith or integrity, or trying to conform to worldly standards, how we measure up with others.

Pray out loud at your meals and family devotions for the wisdom to recognize subtle temptations and enticements in daily life. Ask for the strength and courage to say "no" when pressured to compromise biblical principles.

May we never be ashamed of our Lord and Savior, our Master, nor ashamed of His cross and His Word of Truth.

Fear of man: "What do they think of me?"

Fear of the Lord: "What does God think of me?"

Fear of man: "How can I fit in?"

Fear of the Lord: "How can I be faithful?"

Fear of man: "What will they say?"

Fear of the Lord: "What has God said?"

Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.

Prayer: Holy Father, set us free from our strong desires to be approved and accepted by others, to be influenced by what others say or think. Set us free from every fear and bondage and lie. Forgive us for our compromises. Increase our faith and confidence in your unchanging love and acceptance, in your abounding grace. Help us to love Jesus more than the world's approval.