

"It is dangerous trap to be concerned with what others think of you, but if you trust the Lord, you are safe." Proverbs 29:25 (TEV)

As humans, it's not surprising that we want people to accept us, to like us, after all it is human nature. The problem comes when we take it a step further, abandoning our values to please others. It is especially problematic for believers since the Bible so clearly warns against being a people pleaser. When we seek to please people rather than God, we find ourselves caught in a trap, compromised, exactly where we shouldn't be!

Why Trying to Please Everyone is a Trap

1. IT CAUSES ME TO MISS GOD'S PURPOSE FOR ME

First Thessalonians 2:4b (NLT) explains, "Our purpose is to please God, not people. He is the one who examines the motives of our hearts." When we are worried about what everyone else wants, we lose who we are, who God created us to be. We can't be the person others want us to be and the individual God wants us to be at the same time. When we try to be the person other humans want us to be, our identity and security are bound by what they say and we miss God's purpose for our lives! We also lose the uniqueness God created into us and the opportunities He has for us. Trying to please people keeps us from achieving God's best for our lives!

2. IT KEEPS MY FAITH FROM GROWING

John 5:44 (NCV) says, "You try to get praise from each other, but you do not try to get the praise that comes from the only God. So how can you believe?" When we act as people pleasers, we lose our ability to grow our faith in Christ. The bigger God is in our lives, the smaller the opinions of those around us become. Those human opinions lose their power. The opposite is equally true – when people's opinions are bigger, God's power in our lives is diminished. How does that look in real life? We give the power, influence, and authority in our lives to the people in our lives rather than to God, the One who deserves it all!



3. IT LEADS TO SIN

God, in Exodus 23:2a, commands, "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong!" There is no doubt here to what God is saying to us. When we are acting as people pleasers, we are looking for outside voices to guide us, making us vulnerable to the power of suggestion. At some point in our lives, likely in our teenage years, we heard this questions from our parents or caregivers, "If everyone else jumped off a bridge, would you jump off the bridge too?" It's most often used as a statement against giving into peer pressure, but it applies to us in adulthood. We all struggle with "peer pressure" seeking to please those people around us, and most of the time what we are feeling "pressured" to do is definitely something we shouldn't. We end up driven by demands, obligations, guilt, pressure, which leads to sin, because we were unable to set up the needed boundaries.

It happened to Saul. In 1 Samuel 15:24 (MSG), we read, "Saul confessed to Samuel, 'I've sinned. I've trampled roughshod over God's Word and your instructions. I cared more about pleasing people so I let them tell me what to do." How often do we fall into the same trap? More importantly, how do we stop? Obeying God, following His path, and seeking to please Him can keep us from sin.

4. IT CAUSES HYPOCRISY

In Luke 16:15a (TEV), Jesus says, "You <u>make yourselves look good in other people's eyes</u> but God knows your hearts." When we are trying to please people, seeking their approval, we often lose ourselves behind the masks we are wearing. Hypocrisy is tiring, always having to decide which masks to wear for which people.

We are called to obey God in everything, with a sincere heart. We are not called to value "eye-service" or submit to "people pleasing." People pleasing goes hand in hand with duplicity. Why? As people pleasers, we can't maintain our integrity because we are usually trying to please multiple people at once and in doing so transforming ourselves and what we stand for along the way. When we sincerely protect our integrity, we are honest with ourselves and others, not afraid to show our true selves, including our strengths but also our weaknesses. It is the opposite of superficiality and hypocrisy.

When we fear the disapproval of our fellow humans and put on a show, we are missing the point. We don't need to be socially acceptable, politically correct, or even popular. God wants us to be our honest selves, true to Him, and acting with integrity. Paul explains, in 2 Corinthians 10:18 (CEV), "You may brag about yourself, but the only approval that counts is the Lord's approval." Asking God for help as we seek His approval can help us flee hypocrisy and put away our people-pleasing masks to find freedom, peace, and purpose in Him.

5. IT SILENCES MY WITNESS.

In John 7:13 (NLT), John writes, "<u>No one had the courage to speak favorably</u> about Jesus in public, for they were <u>afraid of getting in trouble</u> with the leaders."

People pleasing and fear traps us and silences our witness as believers.

Working at people pleasing is much like running on a treadmill and never getting anywhere. Fearing the opinions of others causes stress and anxiety, making us miserable.

In John 12:42-43, John writes, "Many people, including leaders, believed in Jesus. But they wouldn't talk about it publicly out of their fear that the Pharisees would expel them from the synagogue. They loved human approval more than they loved the approval of God." Our witness is silenced because we put what other's think before God! When we seek to please God rather than our fellow humans, we shouldn't be surprised if we "step on toes" or lose the approval of others. After all relationships formed by people pleasing aren't real relationships at all. Real relationships allow for disagreements, so we can grow, be better, and earn one another's respect.

We need to remember God's approval should always come first – even if it means losing the approval of those individuals with whom we have people-pleasing relationships. Most importantly, we need to ask ourselves, "Who would be hearing the truth about Jesus if we were not caught in "false" relationships, fearful of what others thought?"



How Do We Break Free of These People-Pleasing Traps?

EVEN GOD CAN'T PLEASE EVERYONE!

God can't please everyone. Jesus didn't worry about pleasing people. Jesus had principles and values. He knew what He stood for and He wasn't afraid to take a stand. As humans, we all know, the moment we take a stand, someone is going to disagree. Jesus knew it all too well, but it didn't stop Him. He didn't agonize over whether people agreed with Him or supported Him.

He served others selflessly, but He also set boundaries,. He helped, taught, healed, fed, guided, resurrected the dead, and saved others, but He also took care of Himself, which probably left some people disappointed. He chose not to defend Himself, His actions, His reputation, but rather to focus on God's purpose (Mark 3:31-35). He didn't change what He was about just so others would feel better about themselves and they sometimes went away disappointed.

Jesus knew His mission on earth and He refused to compromise because of His great love for us, even though He knew there would be many people who would not be pleased. If the God of the universe can't please everyone – there is no way we can no matter how hard we work at people pleasing!



WE DON'T NEED ANYONE'S APPROVAL TO BE HAPPY!

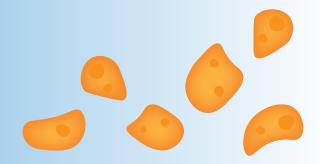
In John 5:41-42 (NLT), Jesus said to the Jewish leaders who were harassing Him, "Your approval or disapproval means nothing to me, because I know you don't have God's love within you." We know we can't please everyone and God doesn't expect us to, but the disapproval of others doesn't have to ruin our happiness. What others think of us is not related to our happiness unless we allow it. Some of us have spent a lifetime trying to please someone in our lives and that, in itself, has created a prison for us. In most cases like this, approval simply can't be earned, and it's not our fault that they are completely unpleasable!

As believers, Jesus becomes number one in our lives and He can set us free of the prison of people pleasing. Other humans can never meet all of our needs or keep us happy, but God can! He is the only one who can meet our needs, comfort us, and give us true joy and happiness. The prophet Isaiah reminds us of this truth in Isaiah 51:12 (NLT), "I am the One who comforts you! So why are you afraid of mere humans, who wither like the grass and disappear?"

WHAT SEEMS SO IMPORTANT IS ONLY TEMPORARY

Jesus says in Luke 16:15b (TEV), "The things that are highly valued by people are worth nothing in God's sight." Knowing that, why does whatever we are doing in the moment seem so important right now? We often fall into the trap of being a people pleaser for this very reason - we are focused on the current moment more than on eternity. The problem is the important "things" of the moment are just temporary. Tomorrow, next month, or a year from now, will they still matter as much as they seem to right now? Think back five years ago - how many of the things which concerned you then still concern you as deeply now (if at all)? What seems so important now is only temporary.

John tells us plainly in 1 John 2: 17 (TEV), "The world and everything in it that people desire is passing away; but those who do the will of God will live forever." We need to focus our attention on God, joining Him in His work on earth, with an eye toward eternity, doing as Jesus directed us in Matthew 6:20-21, "Store your treasures in heaven... Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be."



WE ONLY HAVE TO PLEASE ONE PERSON!

Jesus told us in John 5:30 (NCV), "I don't try to please myself, but I only please the One who sent me." As always, we should follow Jesus example and understand we only have to please one person – God! God made us in His image and He has a purpose for each of our lives. As a result, He is the one we should live for, the one whose approval we should seek. Doesn't that make life so much easier?

Have you ever considered people pleasing as idol worship? Think back to the Ten Commandments, specifically the first two. In Exodus 20:3-5, we find the commands, "You must not have any other god but me. You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods." Anything or

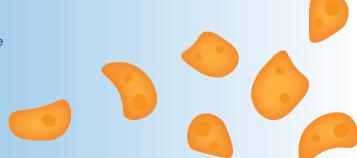
anyone we put ahead of God is an idol, a god. When we act as people pleasers, we put others ahead of God, making them idols simply because we care more about what they think than what God thinks.

In Galatians 1:10 (NLT), Paul lays it out clearly, "I'm not trying to be a people pleaser! No, I am trying to please God. If I were still trying to please people, I would not be Christ's servant." The only thing that matters is what God thinks, but it is hard to hear His voice when other voices are clamoring for our attention If we seek the attentions of our fellow humans and cater to their opinions, we are serving them, not God. When we seek to please God (the only One who matters), our people pleasing days will be over! In truth, when we choose to please God rather than people, we might just find we are also pleasing others as we act in ways that please God.

ONE DAY WE WILL GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF OUR LIFE

In Romans 14:12 (NLT), we are taught, "Yes, each of us will have to give a personal account to God." Knowing we will have to give an account of our lives, our words, our deeds to God one day should change our perspective if we are currently living as people pleasers. In fact, it should help us to stand strong against peer pressure, especially in light of what Jesus did for us! On the cross at Golgotha, He did not deny us or even reconsider what He was doing. Instead, He died for our sins. We owe everything to Him, including our lives! He is our Creator, our Savior, our Everything. He has promised us eternity with Him, and we are

going to have to give account for our lives when we get there. Our integrity, our allegiance to Him is all important – way more than pleasing people here on earth. He told us so, in Luke 9:26 (NIV), "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, I, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when I come in my glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."



BE WHO GOD SHAPED US TO BE

Who does God shape us to be? We find a clue in the God's Word (Romans 12:2 (Ph))
"Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity." God created us for a purpose, for our good, for His glory, that we might become like Jesus. God doesn't want us to be like anyone in our family, any of our friends, or even any great person on earth – He created us to become like Christ, His one and only Son.

In like manner, He didn't ask us to please others, to be popular, to make everyone happy, He simply wants us to become more and more like Jesus. Paul explains it further in Romans 8:28-29, "And we know that God

causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters." As believers, God is shaping us to be like Christ and so fulfill His plans for us.

Where are you today? You can avoid the people-pleasing trap. You can escape the people-pleasing prison you find yourself in. Take a step toward Jesus, then another and another. Surround yourself with those who encourage you to be more Christ-like. Remember, God created you, He knows you fully and completely, He loves you, and He is the only ONE you need to please! Find your purpose in Him today.