

Peer Pressure

Much of God's covenant with Israel dealt with human relations. Many laws pointed out how the Jew was to conduct himself among his peers. One of these admonitions was, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil" (Exodus 23:2). This was a very important decree; it showed the danger of peer pressure and pointed out explicitly the dangers of being led astray by evil men. Peer pressure was an important factor in their lives; it has been from that time to the present. And perhaps as never before, peer pressure is an issue we have to wrestle with.

A leading educator noted that peer pressure is the strongest influence exerted on young people today. He stated that in most cases it is twice as strong as the influence of home and family, and yields a far greater influence than religion. All young people want to be accepted by their peers. And if to do so means disobeying parents and selling out personal convictions, some are willing to do so just to be a part of the bunch. In dealing with young folks and their problem of peer pressure, we often quote 1 Corinthians 15:33: "Evil companionships corrupt good morals." I contend this is an important verse dealing with this subject. This admonition does caution against the dangers of peer pressure being exerted by those who are void of spiritual convictions and virtues. Let us continue to warn our young people of the dangers of their associates that rob them of their virtues.

But is all peer pressure centered in the young? Does this pressure cease when we become adults? At all stages of life there are peer pressures put on us by those with whom we mix and mingle. Christians have always faced pressures in dealing with their peers. And when God has spoken, He has always done so with a stern warning against letting our associates rob us of our moral integrity.

One of the most striking examples of this occurred in the life of Peter. Peter was one of Christ's most ardent followers. He said, "Even if I must die with thee, yet I will not deny thee" (Matthew 26:25). He declared, "Lord, with thee I am ready to go both to prison and death" (Luke 22:33). But on that fateful night of the arrest and trial of the Lord, Peter "followed afar off" (Matthew 26:53). He stood with the enemies of the Lord (Matthew 26:69). And when asked about his allegiance to Christ, he denied that he even knew Him (Matthew 26:69-74). Peter, when alone with the enemies of Christ, relented to peer pressure. What a lesson for the Christian today. When we are alone with those who have no regard for the Lord or spiritual values, we are at the most vulnerable moment of our spiritual life. And so often, the pressures from our peers lead to our downfall.

There are other examples in the New Testament on this subject. Peer pressure played a leading role in the rejection of Christ by the rulers of the synagogue (John 12:42-43). Likewise, peer pressure was the deciding factor in the heinous crime of Herod (Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:23). Herod feared and respected John, but his oath, along with his peers prevented him from backing down on his promise, and resulted in having John the Baptist put to death. In this we see the influence and power of wicked men and the insidiousness of peer pressure.

But there is another side of the coin of peer pressure. Not all the characters of the Bible collapsed under the pressure of their associates. Many stood, often alone, in the face of severe pressures put on them by others. Be aware of the immense pressures put on you by your peers, especially those with no regard for God and spiritual values. Profit from the mistakes others made and redouble your efforts not to yield to these peer pressures as they did.

Adapted from Bob Waldron