

# People Pleasing and the Fear of Man

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**Question:** "Can you explore this topic of fear of men?" So that's the topic: fear of men. "Now, if a believer is free from sin, how can one feel so dominated by this particular gripping sin?" Now, he writes more, but I'm going to stop right there. I often get questions that are worded like this. You say, like what? I often get somebody that says to me, "I know I'm a Christian. Please explain to me how I can be living in sin." That approach is common. I know I've been regenerated. I know I believed. I know I'm a Christian. And yet, would you please explain to me how it is that I can be controlled by this un-Christian conduct? Those are the kind of questions oftentimes that you get. And it's like, ok, there's a fatal flaw in logic there. One of the things is this: We don't want to just assume we're Christians and then ask the question - it's like, I know I'm a Christian, even though when I look at the Bible, the things that the Bible says are true about Christians, I don't see are true in my life. So would you please explain to me? I know I'm a Christian, but how is it that my life can be characterized by un-Christian conduct when I know I'm a Christian? (Incomplete thought) And I would like to turn it around and say I'd rather you explain to me how you can be a Christian when your life is full of un-Christian conduct. I can't explain that to you, because I think what's happening is you are basically starting out by a faulty assertion. You've got a faulty presupposition here that is making your logic bad all the way through. You want to turn the thing around. What you really want to do is say, the Bible says that true and legitimate Christianity looks like this; ok, now I'm going to examine my own life in light of what the Bible says true Christianity looks like. If I measure up to the standard, that's a positive thing. If I don't measure up to the standard, that may mean I'm in trouble. That's how you want to reason. But anyway, we'll go on.

"As with matters of the soul, a short question is hard to compress everything. I would like to ask you about this deplorable sin of fear of man in general. It takes on many words today, i.e. social anxiety, man-pleasing, seeking glory in this world, etc., but strangely is not something talked about much in church. Some personal context: I recently discovered that my struggle to communicate freely with people without fear for many years is directly proportionate to my desire to seek God above all things. (And that would make sense.) I hate this sin, yet in my pleading with God for repentance..." Can we just stop right there? God never tells us to plead for repentance. God tells us to repent. "I hate this sin, yet in my pleading with God for repentance and looking to Christ, it seems I am only seeking to be cured from such sin - the burden of anxiety, without wanting more of God. How can this be?" Again, he's asking me questions about how can this be. "I struggle in wondering how can such an odious sin be present in a believer's life." You see, there's that bad logic again. "How is it true repentance if every day is just a repetitive struggle to turn away from this?" Well, it's not. (incomplete thought) He's asking how can it be true repentance as though the first assumption is it is true repentance. Well, the reality is he's describing that which is not characteristic of true repentance. "In conclusion, it really is exhausting. Never have I felt so dominated and controlled by any sin as this. It pains me that this is bigger than the God I profess to believe in. Never also have I felt so helpless, like one

who does not know Christ. Yes, it makes me question assurance deeply." And it should. And so in the end, it sounds like his thinking is somewhat on the right track. "But in all this, thank you and James for reading this." (incomplete thought) So the end is thankfulness.

**Discussion:** But let's talk about this. Aside from his making certain assumptions which are backwards, (incomplete thought). Let's do a bit of a theology of the fear of God. Anybody think of any texts that deal with the fear of God? Or, being a man-pleaser? Or, anything of that sort?

**(from the room)** Matthew 10:28

**Tim:** Matthew 10:28 Do you have it right there?

**(from the room)** "And do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Then He goes on to say, "Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows."

**Tim:** Anybody think of any others?

**(from the room)** The beginning of wisdom. Proverbs 1:7? "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."

**Tim:** We're talking about the fear of man.

**(from the room)** "Whoever confesses Me before men..."

**Tim:** "Whoever confesses Me before men..." That's an interesting one. Proverbs 29:25 That's a big one. Why don't you quote that?

**(from the room)** "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe."

**Tim:** The fear of man lays a snare. (incomplete thought) I often think of a text very close to the beginning of Isaiah. It's in Isaiah 2 that has to do with this. Anybody know the text I'm talking about?

**(from the room)** Verse 22, "Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for what account is he..."

**Tim:** I remember Paul Washer preaching on that text. Stop regarding man. Another one that jumps to my mind is this one: It's found in John 5. And this is very helpful. Because what Jesus says is, He looks at the leaders there. You remember, He's been seeking to make the case for Himself being the Christ, and He's putting all this proof; all these witnesses before the people. And He says, "I say these things so that you might be saved." But as He's getting toward the end of the chapter there, He says this: "How can you believe..." Who does what? Seek the glory

of men. Receive honor from one another and not the glory or the honor that comes from God. Here's the thing, how can you believe...? you know what? It is an issue of faith. It is an issue of believing, if you really think about the fear of man. How do we overcome the fear of man? Faith. What is it that you believe?

**(from the room)** That you are of more value than the sparrows.

**Tim:** Well, if you think about Jesus' words that you ought not to fear those who can kill the body only and then there's nothing more they can do to you, but fear Him who can what? The idea is you're comparing God and people. Even when you think about Peter before the Sanhedrin. We ought to obey God rather than man. Now man will put pressure on you to obey him. The issue is this, that you fear him most whose approval you seek most. That's a reality. If you seek the glory of man, then you fear man's disapproval more than anything else. And that's a real issue. And see, what Jesus is doing is He's confronting us with the truth. It really has to come down with what you believe. You know, I remember situations when I worked as an engineer. I remember having meetings with my department. I remember being in a meeting and I remember guys telling some bad joke or something, and I remember being in that situation. And right there, it's: Am I going to honor God or am I going to laugh at these guys? Am I going to make these guys feel uncomfortable by the way I respond right now, or am I going to seek God's approval? Is it their approval or God's approval? And what happens is the scales come out. Instantaneously, they come out. Whose approval do I seek most? Now a lot of that has to do with do you really believe God is right here? Do you believe He's right with you? Do you believe He's watching? Do you believe that there's an accounting? Do you believe that there's an approval? Do you believe that you can grieve Him? Do you believe that if you seek man's approval, you're going to grieve the Spirit? (incomplete thought) Do you really believe those things? That doesn't mean there isn't fear. The thing about fearing God more than fearing man doesn't mean that the fear of man goes away, but it means that when you're confronted by it, God gives you a courage to do the right thing and to believe the right thing and to believe that He is worth having the approval of more than man is. But it really comes down to you have to be convinced; you have to believe that reality when you're confronted with it.

Look, I don't know anybody - maybe some of you can raise your hand and say you know what, I really don't care what any man or any woman or any child thinks of me in any scenario at all. I care not at all. I doubt there's any like that. Why? We're social creatures. We do like the approval of man. You know what the thing is? We like to be liked. And that's one thing that makes it hard about becoming a Christian, because you're thrown into a situation - I'll tell you, this is one of the tell-tale signs of true Christianity - is when men and women claim they've been saved and you throw them (incomplete thought). This tends to be such a hallmark of the hypocrite. They're man-pleasers. The hypocrite is a man-pleaser. He appears holy in certain situations, because you're watching him. And he wants to appease you. But I'll tell you, you take him and you throw him on a bar stool, and he'll appease the people there. You throw him in the workplace, and you have a guy tell a dirty joke at work, he'll appease.

I remember Craig telling the story about checking out a piece of machinery from a tool crib - a tool of some kind he was checking out. And the guy there used the Lord's name in vain, and Craig said something to him about not using the name of the Lord thy God in vain, and the guy went off on him. Craig was shocked how badly the guy went off on him. And that's the thing. Sometimes people will go off on you. Or sometimes you'll just be shunned. Sometimes you'll be the outcast. Sometimes it's just the smirk on people's faces. Sometimes it's just not being included anymore.

See, it all comes down to, you know what? I want the approval of my Lord more than I want their approval. And that's really the issue. It tests - to the hilt - it tests what we believe. It's powerful. And there in John 5, that's the issue. Jesus said I don't seek the glory of man. And that really needs to be the place we as Christians are. Yes, there's a place to seek approval in the sense that you know, you want to be a good worker at work. But you know what, when your boss wants you to do something wrong?

My brother-in-law Rick, his boss wanted him to cheat on the item list/inventory on these shipments that come in on these pallets, and he resigned. I'm not doing it. His boss told him, "you are going to do it." There was a time they had to take inventory on something and his boss had been wrongly inventorying things for a long time, and he told Rick, you are going to do it. And Rick said I'm not going to do it. This is where we get put to it. How can you believe? See, that's the thing. What's Jesus saying there? Think about those words. How can you believe when you seek the glory of man? (unintelligible) It's like loving God and money. They're conflicting loves. They're conflicting interests. (Incomplete thought) It's like, ok, I'm there in the engineering meeting, and a guy says something that's wicked, and everybody else is laughing. How am I going to respond? (incomplete thought) Where's my love? What is it that I desire most here? And Jesus talked about it. Eric brought up the text. Before men - what we do before men. How we proclaim Christ. How we testify to Him. How we stand for Him before men. That's a real issue. And it comes down to the truth. It comes down to what you believe. That's really the issue.

**(from the room)** I also think it comes back to the validity of the walk. I was talking about earlier today Luke 22 and how Christ commanded Peter to pray, and he slept instead, which led him to follow at a distance, and following after that, he denied the Lord before a servant. And I think it just goes back to our personal walk with the Lord on a daily basis. If we don't have that intact, there's no power going forth in the workplace or at school or at Walmart or wherever we're at. I mean, I've seen significant difference in my own walk when there's days where I've spent little time in the Word, and I go to work and face the same situation where I'm denying the Lord in a certain way. Versus on another day when I spent quality time with Christ, and then go to work, face the same trials and the same temptations, but I overcome it. So I think it just comes back to your daily walk with the Lord.

**Tim:** Well, if we think about this being a matter of faith - faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ. There's a reality that when a person is prayerfully in the Word and then he goes off into

this world, the Spirit grips people's minds with truth. That truth is prevalent. It's before your eyes. It's there. It's fresh. The Spirit makes it so. And it tends to be powerful. And it's not like Christians don't hesitate, but you know, when the Word is fresh and it's there and it's vivid, it's constraining - it's compelling. Yeah, you're not going to do well in this battle if you're not in the Word and your faith isn't being constantly stirred by the Word, by the Spirit of God using the Word in your life. One more before we end.

**(from the room)** (unintelligible) make a distinction for, say a new convert may get confused on this, but like in Galatians 1:10 it says, if I'm still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. But then in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul says I try to please everyone in everything I do. Now, he says not seeking my own advantage, but some new Christian, they read 1 Corinthians 10, and it says I try to please everyone. And then in Galatians 1:10, it says if I'm trying to please man, I'm not a servant of Christ. I think you kind of already hit on this, but what's the big difference there between both of those verses in what Paul's saying?

**Tim:** Well, obviously, there's a time to please God when it offends men. And then there's a time to make sacrifices for the sake of proclaiming the Gospel which pleases God and pleases the men that you're preaching to. For instance, when you think of Paul addressing the Corinthians, he did things like not accept money to please men - to put men in a place where he wasn't creating a stumbling block. Basically, when he's talking about pleasing man in that case, he's not talking about pleasing them while he's disobeying God. He's talking about pleasing them in a way that pleases God, because it promotes the Gospel. And basically, are we not told that as much as possible we should live at peace with all men? That is a way that God is pleased with as we're seeking to live with man in peace as much as possible. But what happens is we get confronted by situations where the two are in conflict - pleasing God or pleasing man. They're not consistent. And when they butt heads - when it's pleasing God or pleasing man and you can't do both, that's where Jesus is saying that you need to testify of Him before men, and you need to proclaim Him before men. You need to stand for what's right before men. And you need to not fear man. The issue is this: when pleasing God brings the scowl of a man, or even brings the sword, where they can kill your body. (incomplete thought)

You know, in all of it, you want your eyes on the Lord. Ok, what pleases You? Does pleasing You please my parents? I mean, pleasing You is pleasing my parents right now, Lord? Yes. Ok, I'm going to please my parents. My parents are happy. (incomplete thought) What it means to be a Christian and to obey the Lord is making my parents happy. But He also said He's bringing a sword. There's times I look to Him and He says you need to go to the left. And it's like, ok, I look at my parents and they're scowling because they don't want me to go to the left, but I look at the Lord and He's saying go left. Ok, I go left. Now the sword comes in the family and there's division. But see, all the time my eyes are on the Lord. That's what Paul's talking about. Paul's talking about, ok, his eyes are on the Lord, when it has to do with what's being encountered over there in the Galatian churches, you've got Judaizers who are in opposition to the truth of God and the Gospel of God, and he's going to stand for the Gospel even though it offends all these other people. Now in another case, with the Corinthians, it's a matter of - to not make any

obstacle for the Gospel, I'm not going to take any money when I preach the Gospel. And God's pleased with that too. My eyes are on the Lord. And so, when following the Lord is going to put me in opposition to men, so be it. When following the Lord is going to put me at peace with all men, so be it.

Some seasons are going to be one. There are times He will make our enemies to be at peace with us. And there are other times that even the closest people will be at war with us. And we just have to keep our eyes on the Lord all the time. That's another reason we need to be in His Word. We need that Word. We need to be renewing our minds with that Word all the time. All the time. Because everything about this world - this world is given to man-pleasing. And if you're not constantly in the Scriptures; constantly in the Word; constantly renewing your mind, you just end up thinking worldly. And the worldly way is to please. It's to dress to please. It's to act to please. It's to put on a show to please. It's to get the applause. It's to get the smile. It's to get the approbation of mankind. That's what the world does. And even more, it's to get the jealousy of other people. It's to get the envy of other people. It's to outdo other people so that they admire you and they want what you have and they covet what you have and they covet your spouse and they covet your house and they covet your vehicle. It's just living with this mindset all the time of other people, other people, other people. I mean, even as a preacher, it's like, ok, this thing can hit you at any level. You're going into the pulpit. Is my primary objective: I want to please the Lord? You look at men. There's lots of preachers that preach the way they do because that guy might not give as much. They might leave the church. At every level, we're confronted by this.