

THE DANGER OF PEOPLE-PLEASING

John 12:37-43

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In the popular sit-com “The Office,” the manager Michael Scott hates to make unpopular decisions. He hates it when his staff are upset with him. When he is asked about it he said, “Do I need to be liked? Absolutely not! I like to be liked. I enjoy being liked. I have to be liked. But it’s not like this compulsive need to be liked, like my need to be praised.”
2. One of the primary challenges to Christian life is people-pleasing. We all want to be liked, but this desire, if not checked, can lead to spiritual peril.

II. TEXT: John 12:37-43

1. *37 Even though he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. 38 This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet, who said: Lord, who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*
 - i. Signs: Remember that John uses the word “signs” to refer to Christ’s miracles, because His miracles point to His identity as the Son of God. Although Christ performed many miracles, John covers seven.
 1. Changing water into wine.
 2. Healing an official’s son.
 3. Healing a disabled man at the pool of Bethesda.
 4. Feeding 5,000 people.
 5. Walking on water.
 6. Healing the man born blind.
 7. Raising Lazarus from the dead.
 - ii. Even though the Jews saw these signs, they did not believe in Him. Some did, but most did not.
 - iii. John points out that this is a fulfillment of a prophecy by Isaiah, seven years before the time of Christ. Isaiah 53:1-2 said that many will reject God’s Messiah, and John said that his prophecy was fulfilled in the first-century Jews’ rejection of Christ.
 - iv. Fulfilled prophecy is a reminder that God’s word is true. It is reliable. It is trustworthy.
 - v. In the writings of Buddha, Confucius, and Lao-Tse, you will not find a single example of predicted prophecy.
 - vi. Jeane Dixon was one of the most popular psychics and prophets in America in the twentieth century. She made predictions in three different presidential election, in ’52, ’56, and ’60. She predicted each party’s major candidate as well as who would win each election. She got 0% right. And yet millions of people respect her as a credible prophet.
 - vii. In 1980 the National Enquirer magazine contained the predictions of ten leading prophets and psychics of that day for what was supposed to take

place by the end of the years. Altogether they made 61 prophecies. 0 were fulfilled. And yet many people still believed in these prophets.

- viii. Now let's take the Bible. The Bible has more than 2,000 specific prophecies that have already been fulfilled.
 - ix. The OT contains more than 300 specific prophecies about the coming Messiah that were all fulfilled in Christ. Hundreds of years before Christ was born, the OT predicted that the Messiah...
 - 1. the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem,
 - 2. sold for thirty pieces of silver,
 - 3. that silver would be used to buy a potter's field,
 - 4. that Jesus would be silent when accused,
 - 5. condemned with criminals,
 - 6. that he would have raging thirst when dying,
 - 7. that he would be crucified,
 - 8. that he would be pierced after his death,
 - 9. buried by a rich man.
 - x. Peter Stoner, a scientist in the area of mathematical probabilities, says in his book, *Science Speaks* that if we take just eight of the 300 Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ, we will find that the probability of those eight coming to pass is 10 to the 17th power. He illustrates that staggering amount this way. If we take 10 to the 17th power of silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas, they will cover all of the state, two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly. Blindfold a man and tell him he must pick up one silver dollar. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them come true in any one man. That's just eight. Christ fulfilled hundreds.
 - xi. God's word is true. One of the reasons we can trust it is because of fulfilled prophecy.
2. *39 This is why they were unable to believe, because Isaiah also said: 40 He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so that they would not see with their eyes or understand with their hearts, and turn, and I would heal them.*
- i. Now John quotes another of Isaiah's prophecies. This one is from Isaiah 6:9-10. This prophecy explains why the Jews did not believe in Christ. God blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts.
 - ii. That sounds unfair. Does this mean that God only chooses to allow some to believe, and not the rest? No. You have to understand why God blinds a person's eyes and hardens their heart. Those Jews who were authentic worshipers of God the Father were drawn to Christ; they were the ones who became believers in Christ. But those Jews who were not true followers of Yahweh God, but only hypocrites and pretenders, their hearts were hardened so that they could not recognize God's Messiah.
 - iii. In other words, God hardens the hearts of those who harden their hearts against Him.

- iv. The truth to see here is that God's mercy is limited. For the person who accepts God's mercy, it is unlimited. There is no sin too big for God to forgive. But for the person who rejects God's mercy, it is limited. It is only offered for a limited time, and then in judgment God will harden the sinner's heart so that they cannot believe.
 - v. This was the case with many of the first-century Jews. They were not true believers; not true Jews. They did not truly seek and worship the Father. As a result, God hardened their hearts so they could not recognize and accept Christ.
 - vi. In John 6, after the Jews rejected Christ he said the following. **John 6:44-45** "44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: And they will all be taught by God., Everyone who has listened to and learned from the Father comes to me."
 - vii. No one has the ability to believe in Christ without God's prevenient grace enabling us to believe and drawing us to Christ. But notice that this drawing does not last forever. In the time of Christ it was only extended to "everyone who has listened to and learned from the Father."
 - viii. The takeaway is that today is the day of salvation. Do not delay getting right with God.
 - ix. **Isaiah 55:6** "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call to him while he is near."
 - x. The implication is that God may not always be found; He will not always be near. At some point, if you continue to reject Christ, God will no longer draw you to salvation.
 - xi. **MacArthur** "It is a sobering reality that those who persistently harden their hearts against God may find themselves hardened by Him."
 - xii. **Nelson Study Bible** "The consequence of repeated rejection is loss of the capacity to believe."
 - xiii. **NLT Study Bible** "When revelation comes, we must believe. If we refuse, the light disappears"
3. *41 Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke about him.*
- i. This is an amazing statement. John wrote that the reason that Isaiah made these prophecies is that He saw the glory of Christ and spoke about Him. Isaiah knew about Christ hundreds of years before, and He wrote about Christ. If you doubt this, just read Isaiah 53.
 - ii. This is a reminder that all of Scripture points to Christ. The entire Bible is about Jesus Christ.
 - 1. Go all the way back to Adam and Eve, and in Genesis 3:15 we find the first gospel; a prophecy about the coming Messiah. **Genesis 3:15** "I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

2. We see Christ in the story of Abraham when God promises to make Abraham into a great nation, and to bless the entire world through His descendants (Gen 12:1-3).
 3. We see Christ in the Mosaic law, in the sacrificial system, in Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and in Passover, all pointing to the coming Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world.
 4. We see Christ in a prophecy given to the Jews through Moses, that God would raise up another prophet like Moses (Dt 18:15).
 5. We see Christ in the story of King David, when God promised to establish an everlasting kingdom through His descendant (2 Sam 7:11-16).
 6. And we see Christ through the writings of the prophets.
 7. **John 5:39** "The Scriptures point to me."
4. *42 Nevertheless, many did believe in him even among the rulers, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, so that they would not be banned from the synagogue.*
- i. Notice that many people did believe in Christ, but they were secret believers. They were undercover Christians. They were secret-agent saints. They did not confess Christ for fear that they would be banned from the synagogue.
 - ii. To be banned or excommunicated was to be cut off from Jewish religious and social life. It was the worst thing that could happen to Jew. So they did not confess Christ.
 - iii. What does it mean to confess Christ? It means to openly admit that you are a believer.
 - iv. The problem with these Jews is that their faith was not saving faith. Their belief was not the kind that leads to heaven.
 - v. God requires your public profession of Christ.
 - vi. **Matthew 10:32-33** 32 "Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge me before others, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. 33 But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny him before my Father in heaven."
 - vii. In other words, there's no such thing as a secret agent Christian; an undercover Christian. True Christians are required to go public; to admit it.
 - viii. Making a public profession of faith is a mark of genuine salvation. This is what baptism is. Baptism is your public profession of faith. It the public declaration of your new association with Jesus. Baptism does not save, but to refuse baptism is to refuse to confess Christ, which is a sign that you are not saved.
5. *43 For they loved human praise more than praise from God.*
- i. So, the reason that many Jews refused to confess Christ was ultimately the love of human praise. People-pleasing. They didn't want to be criticized. They didn't want to be rejected. They didn't want to be disliked. So, they rejected Christ.
 - ii. I want us to spend the rest of our time on the danger of people-pleasing.

III. THE DANGER OF PEOPLE-PLEASING:

1. What is people-pleasing? It is the love of human praise. It is when your desire to for human praise interferes with your relationship with God.
2. We all want to be liked. Nobody likes criticism. Nobody likes rejection. Nobody likes to be hated. No sane person takes pleasure in the displeasure of others. We like to be praised. We like to be admired. We like to be applauded. We like to have favor with men. This is a natural human desire. But if human praise becomes something that you love, then it can destroy your relationship with God.
3. To follow Christ you have to be willing to be hated by men. You cannot follow Christ as long as it doesn't lead to rejection by men; that is not a true Christian. A true Christian is one who follows Christ no matter the cost.
4. Let's look at the problems with people-pleasing:

i. It interferes with the love of God.

1. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.
2. What is the main thing? Loving God (Mt 22:37).
3. This is why we must beware of the things that hinder our love for God.
4. Three things destroy the love of God.
 - a. Love of sin.
 - b. Love of the right things inordinately. There are some things that God wants us to love, that are good to love, such as your spouse, your family, your friends, other people, even yourself. But we must be careful that we keep things in their proper place. They must always be subordinate to our love for God. Jesus made it very clear that you must not love your family more than God (Mt 10:37). When you love something more than God, it is not love, it is idolatry. You cannot love someone well if you love them more than God.
 - c. Love of the wrong things. There are some things that are not necessarily evil, but they are not worthy of our love. These things include money, food, pleasure, sex, material possessions, vacations, etc.. We can enjoy these things; but we must not love them. If we love them, they unavoidably destroy our love for God. Human praise falls in this category. If we love human praise, it will destroy our love for God.
5. **1 John 2:15** "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

ii. The things people admire God hates.

1. **Luke 16:15** And he told them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the sight of others, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly admired by people is revolting in God's sight."
2. To consistently please people, you will eventually have to do things that God doesn't like. You will have to compromise. You will have to lie, cheat, steal, compromise, cut corners. You will have be silent

when you should speak up, and sit down when you should stand up, and turn left when you should turn right.

3. Right now the world admires people who come out as gay. That makes you kind, compassionate, moral, upstanding, a good citizen in the eyes of the world. But God hates homosexuality.
4. Right now the world admires people who decide to transition to a different gender. The Lord hates this.
5. Right now the world admires people who support a woman's right to choose. This is seen as compassionate, and merciful, but God hates murder.
6. Right now the world admires people who support socialism – the government confiscation of private property for the purpose of equitable and compassionate redistribution. This is seen as kind and compassionate. But God hates theft, even at the hands of the government.

iii. We cannot serve God and please people.

1. **Galatians 1:10** "If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ."
2. A Christian is a servant of Christ. The Greek word for "servant" here is *doulos*, which literally means a slave of Christ.
3. All Christians are slaves of Christ. We exist to carry out His will and to please Him and to serve His interests, not ours.
4. But if your aim is to please people, to be liked, to be popular, then you cannot be a servant of Christ.
5. The interests of Christ and the people of this world are often at odds. Serving Christ will cause you to be hated by the world; and pleasing people will require that you ignore the Lord.
6. From time to time, Christ will call you to do things that will be unpopular. Who are you going to serve? Who are you going to please? Christ, or people?
7. **Quote** If you try to please everybody all the time, you won't please anybody anytime.

iv. People-pleasing leads to hypocrisy.

1. One of the primary dangers of people-pleasing is that it leads to hypocrisy. It leads to pretending. It leads to duplicity. Insincerity. It leads to doing religious things for the wrong reasons. It leads to acting spiritual in one setting, and unspiritual in another setting, depending on who is watching.
2. This was a huge problem in the first century. In the Jewish community, it was cool to be a devout Jew. So, many people put on a show of devotion, not because they loved God, but to impress people. When they gave to the poor, they would tell everyone about it. When they prayed, they made sure everyone could see and hear

them. When they fasted, they made sure everyone noticed (Mt 6:1-18). But then behind closed doors they acted very differently.

3. Jesus said that this hypocrisy, this showiness can cause you to lose your heavenly reward.
4. **Matthew 6:1** “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward with your Father in heaven.”
5. God would rather you be irreligious than pretentious. But most of all, He wants you to please Him rather than people.

v. People-pleasing can prevent you from getting saved.

1. This is what we see in John 12.
2. We see two reasons that people don't follow Christ.
 - a. God's hardening. This is the inability to believe due to persistent rejection of God's love.
 - b. The love of human praise.
3. The love of human praise, or the fear of rejection, can be so strong, and so dangerous, that it can prevent you from going to heaven.
4. Isn't that ridiculous? How does it benefit you if the whole world loves you, but then you die and go to hell?
5. **Proverbs 29:25** “The fear of mankind is a snare, but the one who trusts in the Lord is protected.”

IV. CONCLUSION

1. Perhaps people-pleasing, the love of human praise, or the fear of man, has been preventing you from becoming a Christian. Or from being sold-out to Jesus. If that is the case, would you make a decision today to forsake the world for Christ? To follow Christ and do His will no matter what people say?
2. Sing “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus.”