

Fearing Disapproval
December 15, 2013

A Baptist pastor, Rick Warren, appeared on the Piers Morgan show this week. He is a regular on the show. Every time he appears Piers Morgan hits him with the gay marriage issue, hoping to get him to change his mind. He even asked him this week if someday he might change his mind. Rick said, he can't see that happening because he fears the disapproval of God more than he fears Morgan's disapproval or the disapproval of society.

Rick nailed an issue we all face each day. We all face temptations to give in to other people's expectations of us. What decision we make may bring their disapproval. They may not like what we choose and may not be shy about telling us so.

Who has expectations of you? Your parents for one. No matter how old you are your parents have expectations of how you should behave, how you should use money, who you choose for friends, what kinds of activities are appropriate, and more. When you fail to live up to your parent's expectations conflict often follows. Your parents may not be shy in communicating to you that they do not approve of the choice you made. Maybe they do so over and over again. They nag you about it changing. Or maybe you have the kind of parent who keeps quiet about your choices. Fortunate you.

Other people who have expectations of you are your friends, especially if it is a group. A group of friends develops a set of expectations of those in the group. Sometimes they are unspoken expectations, until you fail to live up to them. Then the group comes down on you to express their disapproval. They may even let you know that your continued part in the group depends on you changing your decision. Groups can be tough. Groups can be supportive or condemning.

Others who have expectations of you would include your bosses and/or coworkers. Society in general has expectations. Your neighborhood has expectations of you. Failure to meet the expectations of any of these groups can bring their disapproval. That puts you in a tough spot. Choosing to oppose the group can bring you into conflict with them.

Most of us do not like this kind of conflict. So we are tempted to avoid the disapproval of others. Unfortunately to do this we must make compromises. If two different groups have competing expectations of you, you face the tough decision of how to satisfy both.

For example, if your parents expect you to dress one way and your friends expect you to dress a different way, you risk the disapproval of one or the other, or both. Such expectations may involve clothes, language, slang, music, attitudes towards authority, and much more.

Experiencing the disapproval of others can be hard. It can be embarrassing, hurt your feelings, make you feel un-liked or uncared for. It can result in feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, even lead to physical symptoms.

Resisting other's expectations has costs. But giving in to the expectations of others also has costs. A pastor in Canada, Carey Nieuwhof, writing about church leadership

describes what happens when leaders compromise. He says that when leaders believe some major change is needed, communicate that to the church and get negative feedback, their natural reaction is to compromise in order to appease the negative voices. The same is true for all of us when the issues involve our values and beliefs. When you compromise in these areas, Carey says that five things happen that undermine your leadership. He is writing about leadership, but we can see some parallels to all of us.

First, he says, you lose the mission. The target the group was originally aiming for gets modified. You get sidetracked from the original target. Over time the mission becomes changed altogether.

Second, you end up not liking who you've become. A pattern of compromising leads to feelings that you have sold out. You lose your sense of integrity. That creates an inner pain in your soul.

Third, he says is that it becomes harder to hear the voice of God. When you are focused on keeping everyone else happy, you become less sensitive to the voice of God speaking through scripture to your heart.

Fourth, you are tempted to leave. And even if you don't leave other leaders may do so. They see what is happening and they aren't willing to compromise. So they look for another church.

And fifth, nobody's actually that happy. Making compromises is hard on everyone because no one really gets everything they want.

(<http://careynieuwhof.com/2013/11/5-ways-people-pleasing-undermines-your-leadership/>)

There are problems that come from consistently compromising to avoid the disapproval of others. Yet we are all tempted to do it.

In addition to all the expectations others have for your life, there is God. Most of us have a good idea what God expects of us in terms of morality and ethics. We also have a good idea of what culture expects of us. Currently, there is a big difference between popular culture or political correctness and what we know God expects of us. We know that if we choose God, some people will write us off, turn against us, treat us differently than before, ostracize us. To avoid this we are tempted to give in to the culture's expectations and turn away from what God expects of us. And, sadly, we see some people today who call themselves Christians who are giving in to culture's expectations, going with what is popular.

We can see both examples in the Bible. We're going to look at two men this morning in the book of 1 Samuel.

The first man is King Saul, the first king of Israel. Being the first, the kingship wasn't set strongly in place yet in the nation. And not everyone was happy when Saul was first made king. So Saul starts off with some image problems. He starts off his kingship with worries that just as he was given the kingship, it might be taken away from him.

On one occasion Saul was given an assignment by God, through the prophet Samuel. This assignment involved the Amalekites. The Amalekites were an ancient nomadic

people who lived in the upper Sinai peninsula. As the Israelites were roaming through the wilderness for 40 years on their way to Canaan, the Amalekites would sneak up behind them and attack any stragglers. So God pronounced His judgment upon the Amalekites for these unprovoked guerrilla attacks. He told King Saul to go and annihilate the Amalekites.

Now those unfamiliar with the Bible find that horrific. But as the supreme judge of all men, having complete and perfect knowledge of their guilt and innocence, Yahweh God can do that. He isn't stomping on anyone's rights when He does so. He had allowed the Amalekites many years to recognize their sin and repent. They had failed to do so. Now God was bringing judgment on them. That is, by definition of deity, what God can do.

God's instructions to King Saul were very specific.

1 Samuel 15:3 (NIV) Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys."

So Saul goes out with his army and they attack the Amalekites. They kill all the people... except the king of the Amalekites, and they kill all the animals... except that they bring back the best of the cattle and sheep to sacrifice to Yahweh.

But Yahweh is displeased that Saul disobeyed His command about killing all the people and animals. So God sends Samuel to confront Saul. We're just going to look at one part of their conversation, the part where Saul admits what he did and why.

1 Samuel 15:24 (NIV) Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated Yahweh's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them.

Saul was afraid of the people's disapproval if he stuck to his instructions and had them kill all the people and all the animals. He feared their disapproval more than he feared Yahweh's disapproval. After all, they might decide to replace him as king.

This was the second time Saul had made such a major decision. So God decides to end the dynasty of King Saul with Saul. His son Jonathan would not succeed him as king. God gave the kingdom of Israel to another man. You have likely heard of this other man, or at least of an event that occurred when he was a teenager. It involved him killing a giant of a man named Goliath. And the boy who would be king was named David.

We don't have time for the whole story. You have probably read it or heard it before. You can imagine that David becomes quite popular in the nation of Israel. He becomes so popular that Saul fears David becoming king one day. So Saul tries to kill David. David has to run for the hills and hideout for some years. Other good men like David, who also were not in Saul's favor, gathered around David, roaming from place to place to hide from Saul and the army.

One day Saul learns that David is hiding in a particular part of the country and he and the army go there to find him. They stop in a certain place and Saul goes into a cave to relieve himself.

David and his men are hiding in the back of the cave and the men suggest to David that this is his opportunity to take revenge on Saul and kill him.

1 Samuel 24:4-7 (NIV) The men said, "This is the day Yahweh spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe. Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. He said to his men, "Yahweh forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, Yahweh's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of Yahweh." With these words David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

Do you hear the respect in David's words, the respect He had for Yahweh? He feared Yahweh's disapproval more than that of his own men. God had made Saul king, and David had no right to interfere with that, even to save his own life. He trusted God to do what God had foretold would happen, that David would someday, somehow, become king over all of Israel. David would not take it upon himself to make that happen in opposition to God.

This was not a one time thing with David. He consistently lived for the approval of God's expectations. He did not do so perfectly, but he did so consistently. Saul consistently compromised in order to meet people's expectations.

We see here two men. One feared the disapproval of men and the other feared the disapproval of God. As a consequence, because of their choices, one failed in life and the other succeeded. There is a lesson for us in their story this morning.

Whose disapproval do you fear most, God or people? Each day you face situations and decisions that involve that choice. Yesterday you made decisions that were in submission to God's expectations,... or you compromised in order to meet someone else's expectations.

Whose disapproval do you fear the most? As followers of Jesus we face the temptation to compromise with the world's values. We are tempted to ignore Biblical truth in order to fit into society. We are tempted to re-interpret Biblical passages about homosexuality. We are tempted to re-define marriage. We are tempted to approve of sex outside of marriage.

So how can we find strength to resist compromising with the world's expectations? Let's look at a letter from Peter to some early Christians that gives us some help.

1 Peter 4:1-4 (NIV) Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.

The word dissipation means the kinds of things listed in verse three, but doing them to the point of harming one's self. This is the direction of things in our world. And they don't understand us. They say, "What is wrong with you Christians? You are so old fashioned, so out of it, so behind the times. You need to update what you believe and live." But we know these are not the ways God wants us to live. So what help is there for us to resist these expectations?

How can we find strength to resist compromising with the world's expectations?

> Know that following Jesus will cost you in this life.

1 Peter 4:1-4 (NIV) Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude...

Following Jesus will cost you. It may cost you friends. In many Muslim and Hindu countries, it is costing new believers their families. Their families kick them out, threaten them with harm if they do not leave, and some never see or hear from family again. Following Jesus will cost you too. You will not fit in with culture if you follow Jesus. You have to decide that is okay with you if you will be strong against the expectations of others.

> Keep the end in mind. Look at the next verse in that passage.

1 Peter 4:5 (NIV) But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Everyone will have to give an account. You are going to have to answer to God for how you live. Love to please Him. Saul feared man's disapproval more than God's disapproval. He wasn't willing to go against the group. He wasn't willing to resist the peer pressure. He paid for that then and will pay for it on the Day of Judgment. We all will give an account of our lives to God. Keep this in mind.

Call on God for help.

You know many of places, times, and events in which you face this temptation. Bring these to God in prayer before the start of your day. Lay it out before God. Tell Him of your struggle. Affirm your desire to meet His expectations and resist opposing expectations. God will always give you the help you need in order to meet His expectations. Look at what God promises us through Peter's next letter.

2 Peter 1:3-4 (NIV) His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

As we pray and depend on God, He will give us what we need to escape the corruption of the world. He will give us the strength and determination to resist the expectations of others.

Keep an eye on the results of resisting peer pressure.

Those men who followed David, once they saw David's courage to stand up to them, and heard his reasoning, respected him all the more. When the opportunity to kill Saul presented itself, they spoke quickly and rashly. Once they heard the wise answer of David, they agreed with it.

2 Samuel 3:36 (NIV) All the people took note and were pleased; indeed, everything the king (David) did pleased them.

David risked their disapproval and ended up winning more approval. You will find the same. By risking disapproval of others, you will find the approval of like-minded people when you explain your resistance. They will become the group of support you need to face even greater challenges ahead.

God has expectations of us as His creation. His first expectation is that we believe in Him. As He convicts us of the truth of the Good News and our sin, He expects us to admit our sin to Him, repenting in grief for it. And God then expects us to commit ourselves to the Savior and Lord God has sent: Jesus.

I encourage you to do so today. Fulfill these expectations that your Maker has for you.