

Dealing with the Pressure to Follow Christ

Acts 5:12-42

INTRODUCTION:

We live in a day and time where everyone is trying to make everyone happy and appeased, and when everyone tries to make everyone happy it is like making a square circle because it is simply a task that is unattainable. Psychologists call this *Codependency*. It really is a lack of a sense of who we are in our true and proper identity under God, therefore, making us want to find validation in what others say or think about us.

In the present time of the holidays we see this live and in color. We see many in our time trying to take Christ out of Christmas to reduce the holiday of Christmas to simply a secular celebration where many are not offended. We also see Christians doing this by focusing on the secular meaning of gifts and commercialism verses a time to pause our lives and worship. The focus in our society becomes much more on “What am I getting for Christmas?” over and above “Who did God give at Christmas?”.

This morning I want us to focus our attention on the subject of ***Dealing with the Pressure to Follow Christ***. In this area I don't think we Christians do a very good job of this. We surrender to the cultural pressure, peer pressure, employment pressures, and often the family pressures when there are family members who don't believe who we are expected to gather with us around this time of year. Furthermore, this is not just about the pressure we may feel around this time of year, but all year round in what it means to follow Christ when the pressure comes. Let's look today at how the early believers dealt with the pressure.

Acts 5:12-42

Many signs and wonders were being done among the people through the hands of the apostles. By common consent they would all meet in Solomon's Colonnade. None of the rest dared to join them, but the people praised them highly. Believers were added to the Lord in increasing numbers—crowds of both men and women. As a result, they would carry the sick out into the streets and lay them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them. In addition, a large group came together from the towns surrounding Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Then the high priest took action. He and all his colleagues, those who belonged to the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. So they arrested the apostles and put them in the city jail. But an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail during the night, brought them out, and said, “Go and stand in the temple complex, and tell the people all about this life.” In obedience to this, they entered the temple complex at daybreak and began to teach.

When the high priest and those who were with him arrived, they convened the Sanhedrin—the full Senate of the sons of Israel—and sent orders to the jail to have them brought. But when the temple police got there, they did not find them in the jail, so they returned and reported, “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing in front of the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside!” As the commander of the temple police and the chief priests heard these things, they were baffled about them, as to what could come of this.

Someone came and reported to them, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple complex and teaching the people.” Then the commander went with the temple police and brought them in without force, because they were afraid the people might stone them. After they brought them in, they had them stand before the Sanhedrin, and the high priest asked, “Didn’t we strictly order you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to bring this man’s blood on us!”

But Peter and the apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had murdered by hanging Him on a tree. God exalted this man to His right hand as ruler and Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. A Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law who was respected by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered the men to be taken outside for a little while. He said to them, “Men of Israel, be careful about what you’re going to do to these men. Not long ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about 400 men rallied to him. He was killed, and all his partisans were dispersed and came to nothing. After this man, Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and attracted a following. That man also perished, and all his partisans were scattered. And now, I tell you, stay away from these men and leave them alone. For if this plan or this work is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even be found fighting against God.” So they were persuaded by him. After they called in the apostles and had them flogged, they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them. Then they went out from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonored on behalf of the Name. Every day in the temple complex, and in various homes, they continued teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

I. The Pressure

James 4:4

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

Proverbs 14:12

There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.

1 Corinthians 1:18

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is God’s power to us who are being saved.

II. The Priority

Hebrews 12:1-3

Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay before Him endured a cross and despised the shame and has sat down at the right hand of God's throne.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, so that you won't grow weary and lose heart.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

"No one should be surprised at the difficulty of faith, if there is some part of his life where he is consciously resisting or disobeying the commandment of Jesus. Is there some part of your life which you are refusing to surrender at his behest, some sinful passion, maybe, or some animosity, some hope, perhaps your ambition or your reason? ... How can you hope to enter into communion with him when at some point in your life you are running away from him?"

Tim Keller

The Gospel is good news not good advice.

Advice = what we should do.

News = report of what was done for us.

III. The Punishment

John 15:18-19

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

Matthew 10:32-33

"Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge Me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father in heaven.

1 Chronicles 29:11

Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.

CONCLUSION

John R.W. Stott

“Jesus never concealed the fact that his religion included a demand as well as an offer. Indeed, the demand was as total as the offer was free. If he offered men his salvation, he also demanded their submission. He gave no encouragement whatever to thoughtless applicants for discipleship. He brought no pressure to bear on any inquirer. He sent irresponsible enthusiasts away empty. Luke tells of three men who either volunteered, or were invited, to follow Jesus; but no one passed the Lord’s test. The rich young ruler, too, moral, earnest and attractive, who wanted eternal life on his own terms, went away sorrowful, with his riches intact but with neither life nor Christ as his possession... The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict, half built towers—the ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish. For thousands of people still ignore Christ’s warning and undertake to follow him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, so called “nominal Christianity.” In countries to which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent, but thin, veneer of Christianity. They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved, enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great, soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life, while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism... The message of Jesus was very different. He never lowered his standards or modified his conditions to make his call more readily acceptable. He asked his first disciples, and he has asked every disciple since, to give him their thoughtful and total commitment. Nothing less than this will do”