

People Make Miserable Idols

“You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and great alike. You shall not fear man, for judgment is God’s.” (Deuteronomy 1:17)

By way of review, as we began our study on people fear we mentioned three important principles:

- (1). The biblical word **fear** means being awed by, controlled by, and worshipping or needing someone.
- (2). People fear includes men, women and children. It’s when anyone controls your life more than God.
- (3). In short, the fear of man is **replacing God with a person**. It is idolatry and it will destroy your life.

Last week we saw the how many of us are controlled by the fear of people exposing us (shame), but closely related to this fear is the most common reason we are controlled by other people: *they can reject, ridicule, or despise us*. This is what we might call rejection fear. We fear we won’t be invited to a party, or that we will be ignored, or that people will not like us, or the people are not pleased with us. There’s a tendency to respect or reverence those who have more money, more power, more education, more attractiveness. We act differently around those who are *great* than we do those who are *small*.

I. Illustrations of people who fear (reverence, need, worship, etc...) man are abundant in Scripture.

In 1 Samuel 15, Saul was commanded to destroy completely the Amalekites. God then gave the armies of Israel grace to defeat these people, *“but Saul and the army spared Agag [king of the Amalekites] and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and the lambs — everything that was good”* (1 Sam. 15: 9). When the prophet Samuel confronted Saul with his gross disobedience, Saul confessed his sin, but justified it. *“I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them”* (1 Sam. 15: 24). Also, a few Pharisees knew Jesus was a unique man, but they didn’t commit. Why? (Jn. 12:42-43). Can we learn from our mistakes? Of course. Look at Peter. He feared man, but (see I Peter 3:13-14). Is your commitment to Jesus Christ one that can endure not being liked, appreciated, or respected?

II. The praise of men (peer pressure) is a subtle trap that keeps a heart from devotion to God.

Jesus himself told the Jewish leaders, “How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?” (John 5: 44). Today we would be nice and call the Pharisees people-pleasers. We say they struggle with “peer pressure.” *“Teacher we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men. You pay no attention to who they are.”* (Matt. 22: 16)

(A). People pleasers are not people lovers....Paul was not a people-pleaser. He was a people-lover, and because of that he did not change his message according to what others might think. Only people-lovers are able to confront for ultimate good (see I Cor. 4:16; I Thess. 1:6; I Thess. 2:4).

(B). Only people-lovers are not controlled by other people. Paul said that if he was still trying to please men, he would not be a true servant of God (Galatians 1: 10).

III. The root of the fear of rejection is the belief that people are big and God is small.

We exalt people and their perceived power above God. We worship them as ones who have God-like ability to “fill” us with esteem, love, admiration, acceptance, respect, and other psychological needs. How can we know people are our idols? We think and feel responsible for other people; we feel compelled to help people solve their problems. We’re tired of feeling like we always give but nobody gives to us. We blame others. We feel unappreciated. We fear rejection. We feel very ashamed.