

Read also *Ephesians 5:8-17*. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

How many of you have been in a position of influencing a young person as a teacher or parent or Scout leader or perhaps as a Sunday School teacher? You probably remember that there comes a time when a student encounters that colossal pressure of peers. C. S. Lewis calls it “the inner ring,” the insiders, the ones in the know, the self-proclaimed trendsetters who have a way of pressuring others. You can’t wear a certain outfit, or you get ridiculed about your hairstyle or challenged to do something wrong.

Once when one of my sons was in middle school he bought a pair of purple plaid pants. They were a popular brand and they were on sale. He could have gotten a three or four shirts for the same price, but *these* pants would be cool. He couldn’t wait to wear them.

School came; he wore them; someone made fun of the pants. He never wore them again.

I got mad. What? You are going to let someone’s opinion control you?

My annoyance could not persuade him. I knew nothing. I was only a mother.

Well, come to find out the young are not the only ones who are subject to peer pressure. For example, your doctor might say, “Your cholesterol is trending up. You need to stay off the fatty foods.” You hear him, but you are going out to dinner with friends. They are having dessert, so you think—so will I! ☺ The next year at your doctor’s appointment you tell him you feel bad, you have no energy, etc. He informs you your cholesterol is off the chart and now he is taking over by putting you on medication and prescribing a mandatory diet and exercise program. Your life is over as you know it!

You were warned, just like parents, teachers, and others warn youths about peer pressure. But you just couldn’t see how it mattered.

Isaiah had another encounter with God, which God said to write down. God warned him not to follow people who had turned away from God, just like a parent advising a youth about peer pressure. Hear the story: READ Isaiah 8:11-22

Do you hear the peer pressure?

“Don’t live like everyone else does!”

So what is it that we are to avoid? What is it that causes darkness in our lives? What is the peer pressure God is trying to help us dodge?

THE LORD’S WARNING:

Do not think *like everyone else* does.

Don't call everything a conspiracy, *like they do*.

Don't live in dread of what frightens *them*.

Do not consult mediums or spirits of the dead for advice.

People who contradict God’s Word are completely in the dark.

RESULTS OF GIVING IN TO PEER PRESSURE:

God will be a stone that makes people stumble, a rock that makes them fall.
God will be a trap and a snare.
Many will stumble and fall, never to rise again. They will be snared and captured.
They will go from one place to another, weary and hungry.
They will rage and curse their king and their God.
Wherever they look, there will be trouble, anguish, and dark despair.

WHY IS THE OUTCOME SO BAD?

They look to people and things which have no power.
They contradict God's Word.
They become weary and hungry because they have no true guidance.
They are in the dark.

Contrast all of that with the ones who follow the Lord's wise counsel.

THE LORD'S COUNSEL:

Make the LORD God holy in your life.
He is the one you should fear.
He is the one who should make you tremble.
Preserve the teaching of God; entrust his instructions to the young who follow you.
Wait for the LORD.
Put your hope in him.

RESULTS OF FOLLOWING GOD'S WAYS:

He will keep you safe.
I and the children the LORD has given me serve as signs and warnings to others who have fallen away from the LORD God.

WHY ARE FOLLOWERS REWARDED?

They look to God.
They trust God's Word.
They wait and God is faithful.
They hope and God powerfully acts.
When judgment comes, you will be safe.

It pays not to give in to godless peer pressure.

Isaiah sees his nation coming apart. Many people have turned away from God. They are busy replacing faith in God for following human thought. But the result is quite negative. Things are not going well for the people in Isaiah's time.

Do you see any of these signs today?

As I read this passage through several times, one thing that suddenly popped out is, "Don't call everything a conspiracy like they do." That seems so strange. Do people go around calling everything a conspiracy? Do you think people do that? What does that mean? So I looked it up.

Conspiracy theory is the idea that certain people or organizations are working in secret for their own benefit against the public good. So it's like things that happen are:

- a plot, or
- a scheme, or
- people are conniving, and
- everyone is basically disloyal.

You can see how this results in dark or negative thoughts and views.

Do you believe in any conspiracy theories? Polls suggest that all Americans believe in at least one conspiracy theory; most believe in several.

A famous conspiracy theory is that JFK was shot not by Lee Harvey Oswald but by either the Mafia, the CIA, Vice President Lyndon Johnson, Fidel Castro, the KGB, or a combination of all the above. Only 20-30% of Americans believe Oswald acted alone.¹

Believing in this, though, breeds fear and low trust. What if your closest ally, like the Vice President was behind the assassination? If this is the case, then you begin to believe others might be disloyal, conniving, and scheming, like your boss or your doctor or the insurance company or a business or political candidates. What if you believe another nation did this? You would give them too much power; they would become great enemies.

Here's another recent conspiracy theory. NASA's Apollo Moon Landing Program was a fake. Twelve astronauts really did not walk on the moon; they are lying. It really took place in Arizona and was filmed by Disney.

Again, the results are that you can't trust people to tell the truth and also that your own government, who raised millions of dollars in taxes to fund this, deceived you.

Can you see how this way of thinking increases fear and lowers trust?

By the way, now, with powerful cameras which can photograph the moon quite clearly, guess what? The astronauts' footprints have been photographed, thereby debunking this conspiracy.

When you fear God only, when you look for guidance in God's Word, and a bad circumstance comes your way, you have powerful resources and stability. You have the assurance that you will be safe from judgment; secure in the light of God's guidance, power, and love. And, you and your children will be a witness to others as you tell your stories.

We are talking about stewardship. The greatest stewardship is putting God first and following the light of God's Word. When you think like everybody else does, when you concentrate on human

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_F._Kennedy_assassination_conspiracy_theories

power and thought, your fears will rise, and your trust will diminish. You will become weary, distressed, and walk around in the dark. But if you overcome that with trust in God, when judgment comes, you will be safe.

What result do you want?

It pays not to give in to godless peer pressure.

AMEN