

Peer Pressure

Galatians 2:11-13

➤ Introduction – A story of Peer Pressure

Peter Gives Into Peer Pressure – Read Galatians 2:11-13 – In these verses, we see **Paul having to rebuke Peter** for giving into the pressure of the Judaizers. When you hear the words “peer pressure”, you may be thinking this a sermon just for the youth but it is not. Peer pressure can be a very powerful and persuasive influence on anyone’s life, young and old.

Definition of Peer Pressure – Some have defined peer pressure as *“the perceived or real pressure on someone to conform to a group or external source causing them to do things they do not actually desire to do.”*

Tools of Peer Pressure - The tools or tactics of peer pressure are **isolation, exclusion and ridicule**. They are often perceived more than they are real but in either case they are very strong.

It is interesting to me that we always want to fit in and be like everyone else. However, when it come to recognizing heroes and highly respected people in our history, it is those people who chose not to go with the tide that we honor and respect the most.

➤ Consider The Significance of Peter’s Caving In to Peer Pressure

The Bible gives us several examples of people who resisted peer pressure and were successful. If you think about it, Jesus himself was subjected to enormous peer pressure. When you consider the background, this case of Peter giving into peer pressure seems almost incomprehensible. Considered one of the “most holy”, this event also serves to show us that Peter was completely human.

1. **Jesus promised great power to Peter** – *“You are the Christ the Son of God... Blessed are you SimonI will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on*

earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Matt 16:19

2. **Peter heals everyone** – *“Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.”* Acts 5:14-16
3. **Peter Shares gospel with a Gentile** – God calls Peter to share the gospel with a Gentile named Cornelius. When he arrives, many people are at his home and they all are eager to hear. They believe and are baptized (Acts 10:24-48). Peter’s response is reflected in his own words, *“I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.”* Acts 10:34-35
4. **Peter defends the Gentiles and salvation by grace** – *“He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?” ... “it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”* Acts 15:9-11

Now we return to the story we read in the beginning. There were these Judaizers that **just can’t take it**. They could not live with the idea that God can make the Gentiles just as clean as the Jew with His Grace alone. They are convinced **they are better, more holy than the Gentiles**. And so, they are out teaching that the Gentiles must be circumcised and follow the **Jewish laws to be saved. These men were willful false teachers.**

What was Peter so afraid of? Was it death or a bodily harm? I think not. The fear Peter had was the same fear we feel from peer pressure today. Peter **feared isolation, exclusion or ridicule**. He is afraid that he might be classed with the Gentile rather than the Jew.

Peter was wrong and Paul knew he must confront him about it (**positive peer pressure**). Paul rebukes Peter and points out that he was behaving one way before the Judaizers arrived but

another afterwards. The matter of binding circumcision to salvation and keeping the law must have been very strong among these Jews. **Peter knew better** for he himself had been involved in seeing Gentiles receive Christ and the Holy Spirit. He had said himself, “why put a yoke upon the Gentiles which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear”. Yet here **he separates himself from the Gentiles in the face of peer pressure** when the Judaizers showed up at Antioch.

➤ Important Points About Peer Pressure

Let us consider some important points about peer pressure.

1. **No One Is Exempt** - No one is exempt from peer pressure. We often associate peer pressure with youth but adults are just as vulnerable. Even our churches are guilty of giving into peer pressure from society.
 - a. **Youth** - Sure, we all know about the peer pressure our youth face: **drugs, alcohol, sex, disobedience**, etc. Our youth of today are hit with peer pressure from every angle. Please **don't overlook the TV** in this process. This is why it is so important that our churches have strong youth programs that encourage and instruct youth in what is right. And, please do not forget that **every single one of you is a mentor** to our youth whether you intend to be or not.
 - b. **Adults** - Adults also face many aspects of peer pressure such as: **money, material goods, alcohol, immorality, business success, children's success**, etc. We **celebrate alcohol** in order to be a part of the party. We strive to have material goods that keep us on the same economic plain as our peers.

Illustration: Recently, our children had some friends over and they were watching a well known comedian on the TV. Passing through, I stopped to listen and laugh along with the group. The guy was very funning until he turned his illustrations to making light of non-married sex. Immediately I knew in my heart it was wrong to listen or to another word of his filth. However, I felt the peer pressure not to embarrass my

children in front of their friends by insisting they change the channel. Fortunately, I did not have to say a word as my son decided on his own that the language was inappropriate and it was time to move on. The TV is a constant source of pressure especially with alcohol.

- c. **Church** - Our churches also face pressure from society and members to be “tolerate” and “compromising” towards things we know scripturally to be sin: **Alcoholism, Homosexuality, Abortion**, etc. As churches, we are not here to condemn. We are here to **preach about sin and the redemption** from sin through Jesus Christ. If we do not preach about the sin, we need not preach about the hope and redemption from sin. If everything is OK and acceptable then there is no need for salvation.
2. **False Motives** - Peer pressure always comes from those who have their own interest at heart and not yours. These were false teachers who did not care about the Gentiles. In reality they **did not want the Gentiles to succeed** but rather wanted the law imposed upon them to see them **fail and to continue the “unclean” mentality**. They knew Gentiles had immoral backgrounds. They could not stand the thought that the Gentiles had received salvation by grace and faith without any works. They wanted to see the Gentiles fall back into their old way so **they would be the religious / pious Jews**. Today when people put peer pressure on us, it their own self interest they are serving, never ours.

Illustration: Abercrombie / Fitch - Around the store they display awful pictures of youth with sexual overtones and the full knowledge it was wrong. They don't care if it makes the young customers think that buying their rags will make them more appealing.

Illustration: Ted Turner comments: “Christians are losers.” “When you look in the mirror, you are looking at your savior”. **This is peer pressure in its simplest form.** Ted Turner doesn't like Christianity and the Bible because it condemns much of his conduct and actions. Therefore, he uses his power to apply peer **pressure to our son's and daughters to have them fall** to his level of immorality.

3. **Inflated Consequences** - The consequences of not giving in are **always inflated and seem greater** than they really are. The consequences of not giving in to peer pressure are **far less than the consequences of bowing to the pressure**. Sure, none of us want to be ridiculed or isolated. However, we must stand for what we know to be right and **remain strong**. Usually the consequences of staying strong seem big in our mind but they are **more perceived than anything**. These men **could not have harmed Peter**. He was simply being **selfish and did not want to be looked down upon by the Jews**. By giving in, history records this incident of him giving in to peer pressure and being rebuked by Paul.
4. **Letting Others Down** - Giving in to peer pressure usually involves letting a other people down. Verse 13 says **other Jews including Barnabas joined him in his hypocrisy**. This must have hurt Paul dearly as Barnabas was his coworker in the ministry to the Gentiles. So often, many others are watching us to see what kind of stand we take and to see if we have what it takes to stand up to the pressure. If we fail, it isn't just ourselves we are **letting down but others as well**.
5. **Disappointing Results** - Giving in to peer pressure never **brings the results we expect**. I am sure Peter was ashamed when Paul pointed out this obvious sin. Peter was being used by the Judaizers. Rarely do those applying the pressure actually accept us. If they do, look **at the pattern we have started**. You will always be expected to **bow to their pressure in order to maintain their acceptance**.
6. **Devastating Consequences** - Giving in to peer pressure produces shame, depression and devastating results. As stated, one never achieves the acceptance and results expected. It becomes a continuous process of wasted time, energy and emotions.
 - a. Giving in to peer pressure usually leaves one feeling helpless, depressed and ashamed.
 - b. **Illustration: Devastation** - I read a story of a young man who was interviewed in prison where he was serving a term for involuntary murder. He said, "I allowed some friends to talk me into drinking with

them. I did not like to drink and had been taught otherwise by my Christian parents. They convinced me to drive since I was the least drunk of the group. I hit another car killing the driver and here I am." This is but one example of many I read in preparing for this sermon. The consequences of peer pressure can be enormous and life long.

➤ **Conclusion - What are we to do**

Paul stood up to peer pressure and stood up for the Gentiles. Thanks to him, you and I sit here to worship today. So, how can you and I be strong in the face of peer pressure? Some straight answers:

1. **Recognize & Confront It** - Recognize good and bad peer pressure. Am I being asked to do something that conforms to God's word and my convictions or not? **Gal. 2:14**
2. **Question The Motives** - Question the interest of the other party. What is the real interest of the people or group applying the pressure?
3. **Question The Outcome** - What is the best and worse outcome that can result from my actions?
4. **Live by Faith** - Gal 2:20 - We must put our faith in Christ and **truly trust the outcomes to him**. When we feel isolated or like lesser people we must **remember who we serve**.

Praise Chorus:

You're all I want.

You're all I need.

Help me know you are near.