

# PEER PRESSURE

The following is a summary of a sermon given by Bob Morton

Young people in God's church are very special to God. 1 Corinthians 7:14 says that "the unbelieving husband is sanctified" - that means set apart - "by the wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband otherwise your children would be unclean but now they are holy". It says that children of members of the church are holy.

That does not mean they are righteous. It means they are set apart by God for a purpose and this special purpose includes opportunities that other young people do not have. Now you young people did nothing to earn them. These things are yours because you are children of members of God's church. This is what we call in a sense a birthright.

A birthright is something you have by right of birth. It's something you have because you belong to a certain family and a birthright gives you certain privileges and blessings that others don't have. Your parents had to make some difficult decisions and courageous sacrifices to come into God's church. Now, you don't have to make most of those sacrifices. You have been freely given the privileges and opportunities of God's church as a birthright. Now this birthright gives you three things.

First, it means you are not cut off from God and His spirit like the rest of the world is. The only way the rest of the world can have God's spirit is if they are chosen by God like your parents were. Now with you it's different. You do the choosing and you are free to choose and having the birthright means you have access to God's spirit if you choose to.

The second thing it gives you is knowledge. That knowledge is important knowledge - vital for your future - the knowledge of God's way of life, the way to true happiness and the right kind of fun that doesn't lead to youthful pitfalls and heartaches. Also you have knowledge of the future and what it holds - that there is a fantastic hope for mankind which you can play a part in.

The third thing the birthright gives you is that it gives you a future of fantastic opportunities now and in the future when Jesus Christ comes back to this earth. God is concerned about our young people because there'll be so many young people who'll need your direction in the millennium and after.

You can choose however to lose this birthright if you're not careful. Is there a book in the Bible that is specifically written for young people in God's church? Well, yes there is. It's called the Book of Proverbs. Like any book the Book of Proverbs has an introduction. It tells you what the book is about and why God wrote it. We read why

God wrote it in chapter 1, verse 4: "To give prudence to the simple" and "to the young man knowledge and discretion."

Now what does it mean in this verse when he talks about knowledge and discretion. Well it simply means the ability to make right choices. We all have to make choices whether we like to or not. The decisions we make in our life will determine whether we will be a success or a failure in life, whether we will be richer or poorer, whether we will be happy or miserable.

God is saying young people need the ability to make right decisions. In verse 6 of the same chapter He says, "to understand a proverb and to understand an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles." That's a little difficult to grasp but what it simply means is that God wrote the book to help you, the youth in the church, to understand the adult world and how to be happy and be successful in it because this world is full of pitfalls and God wants you to know what they are so you won't stumble into them and be hurt by them.

Then in verse 7 He says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and instruction". Now what does God mean when He says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Well, He's saying if you're a young person in God's church the single most important principle to base your life on is this one. The beginning of wisdom comes when we admit only God has the real answers when we believe He exists and respect His laws.

Now if you've been attending church for some time with your parents you know God exists. You don't have to doubt it because it's easily proven but keeping God's laws can be a problem can't it? It can be a problem because none of your friends want to keep them. Well, God also talks about that down further in chapter 1.

After giving us the single most important principle a young person needs to understand He also gives us a second principle which strikes a little closer to home. He says in verse 8: "My son, hear the instruction of your father and do not forsake the law of your mother." Put very simply, that says listen to and obey your parents. Now no-one expects you to be continuously overjoyed by what your parents tell you what and what not to do. God, who gave you your birthright, says you must learn to listen and obey your parents and do what they say unless what they say is directly contrary to God's law.

It goes on to say if you do then many spiritual and physical blessings will come your way. The conditions to those blessings we've read are to obey God and respect our parents, especially if we are teenagers. Now the problem is that it isn't always easy to do these two things. The reason why it's not always easy is because of what has commonly come to be called peer pressure.

We've all heard of peer pressure. Some of us tend to think peer pressure is brand new. What you need to realize is that peer pressure is as old as man. Did you

realize that God talks about peer pressure in chapter 1 of the Book of Proverbs. In fact He singles it out as the main problem or the single greatest pressure that a teenager or a young person is up against.

**What is peer pressure? Peer pressure, simply put, is that persuasive force that causes a teenager to go with his or her friends - to do what they want to do - to have the same attitudes they have - to behave the way they behave - to go where they want to go - to dress the way they want to dress - listen to the same tunes they listen to and to have the same likes and dislikes they have. Parents often have little concept of the pressure other teenagers can put on their children.**

What causes peer pressure? Now it's very interesting. Peer pressure begins with a tiny little child. I don't know if you're aware of it but as a little child becomes aware of the world around it, it develops a simple desire, a desire to be liked. As a child grows older this desire to be liked becomes a desire for approval. Approval is very important, especially from parents and teachers. Now these desires are fine as long as they don't get out of control and become stronger than our desire to do what's right.

Satan tries as hard as he can to feed this desire and as we grow up this desire develops and changes and as we reach our teenage years it becomes a desire to be respected and accepted especially by our own circle of friends. Now this desire to be respected and accepted doesn't last forever. As we move into our early to mid twenties it develops into a desire to be thought of as important.

As we move into our twenties we want to be thought of as important especially by those older than us. Then, as a person enters his thirties, it develops into a desire for prestige and this is what drives a lot of men and women on in their careers, not just to be thought of as important but to attain prestige - to have an important position or office in life. Later on as the individual grows older and if he's given the opportunity this drive for prestige becomes a drive for power and this is why older executives climb over the bodies and careers of younger men to put themselves into a position of great power and this according to those who study it is one of the greatest drives in man.

Now the Bible has a name for all this - this desire which goes through these stages - the Bible calls it vanity. This is not something we're born with but is something which a cunning and very intelligent devil injects into us to hold us captive.

To be accepted and respected by our friends is what makes us the victim of peer pressure and is what stops us saying no when we should say no. Now that word no is a simple two-lettered word but if said with courage it can save millions of heartaches and solve serious problems and untold fears later in life. All of you have

done something you knew you shouldn't have done only to find yourself saying afterwards "Why didn't I have the strength to say no?"

**Just look around the world today. Millions of teenage girls - unmarried mothers and also many of the unmarried fathers who wish they had said no but now it's too late. They can never recall, never reverse the decision that allowed the pre-marital activity that has hurt their lives that has hurt their children's lives and their families and their future.**

There are multiple millions of people in the world suffering from A.I.D.S., not to mention other more prevalent sexual diseases. Some of them just wish they were given the knowledge that what they were doing was wrong but they didn't have that knowledge. Others knew what they were doing was wrong and wish they had the courage to say no but the desire was so strong to be respected and accepted by their friends who began to put pressure on them. For them tomorrow has been cancelled.

Now you can look elsewhere and you can see the thousands of drug addicts and smokers who wish they had the courage to say no to the first puff of the drug they are hooked to today. Now they have destroyed their dreams and replaced them with a series of nightmarish problems. How many drinkers wish they had said no to those extra drinks that caused a serious accident or injury or even death? You see their desire to be respected and accepted by their friends caused them to foolishly give in to the pressure to prove they could hold their alcohol and as a result today their life is filled with remorse and regret and sorrow.

Perhaps you've said to someone else or someone has said to you "Come on, everybody's doing it." Now maybe it's premarital sex or smoking or drugs. The come on might be in a different form like "Just once won't hurt you" or "Don't be chicken". Sometimes it's "Show me you love me" or "Prove you're a real man". Now we've all heard these or similar lines. Maybe they have been used on you or you have used these on others. These are the lead-ins that young people use to put pressure on others to experiment with things like drugs, drinking ,smoking, cheating, pre-marital sex or just compromise on personal integrity.

Now let's face it young people by nature you want to be respected and accepted by others, especially your own circle of friends or your peers. You don't like to appear out of place. Anyway why should someone say no to something that so many others are doing and are seemingly getting away with it. Well, the truth is no-one ever gets away with it ultimately. This is what we need to understand. That's why God warns you in verse 10 of Proverbs 1, "Now my son, if sinners entice you do not consent." In other words say no!

God says to fear Him and listen to your parents because it is from these two sources - our parents and from God's word that we get our knowledge of right and wrong because without that knowledge we'd be swept along in a world where standards

have become nebulous, where no-one knows what is right and wrong anymore and the result could be horrible for us. What we need to realize is this - sooner or later in your life you're going to have to confront and lick vanity - the vanity that makes you want to be respected and accepted by your friends so much that it's out of control.

God goes on to say in verse 11: "If they say, come with us. Let us lay wait to shed blood." Now peer pressure doesn't always go this far so God is taking an extreme example to show us where it can end up. He goes on: "Let us swallow them alive like sheol (or the grave) and whole as those that go down into the pit for we shall find all sorts of precious possessions. We shall fill our houses with spoil. Cast in your lot among us and we will have one purse." In other words we'll all be one circle of friends, we'll all be together. We'll all be one group.

God says: "My son do not walk in the way with them. Keep your foot from their path." What God is saying here young people is this - are you being constantly tempted by your friends to experiment with things you shouldn't. If so God says in this verse that you may have to seriously consider that you're amongst the wrong circle of friends and that's something some people need to consider. If you want to avoid being drawn into wrong things simply don't hang around with those who want to indulge in these things. Why? Well, the next verse tells us. In verse 17 it says, "Surely, in vain the net is spread in the sight of every bird but they lie in wait for their own blood. They lurk secretly for their own lives." What does that all mean? Simply, it means this - ultimately the person who gives in to peer pressure is the one who pays the penalty. God is saying never make the mistake of saying it can't happen to me. Don't make the mistake of thinking others get away with it so why can't I? The truth is others don't get away with it.

Human problems are caused when spiritual laws are broken and those laws are there to show us how to be successful, how to be happy and there are penalties when they are broken and no-one gets away with it. That's why God says ultimately they are lurking and planning and plotting for their own blood and their own lives. In verse 19 He carries on, "So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain. It takes away the life of its owners."

There are penalties and in verse 20 He says this - you don't have to experiment with sin to find out that sin brings penalties! He says: "Wisdom calls aloud outside. She raises her voice in the open squares. She cries out in the chief concourses. At the opening of the gates in the city she speaks her words." What God is saying is that you don't have to experiment with drugs to know the terrible results of drug addiction. You don't have to experiment with pre-marital sex to know the miseries of unwanted pregnancies, the horrors of sexually transmissible diseases, the anguish of the mental problems that stem from the feelings of guilt you go through afterwards.

**God simply says look around you. Observe the results and the tragic lives of those who didn't know the difference between right and wrong, who didn't**

**have the wisdom to make the right decisions when they were young and who didn't have the courage to say no. You see them in the streets, you see them on the beaches, you see them in the hospitals, you see them wherever you find people. That's why God says wisdom cries aloud in the streets!**

You don't have to experiment with it to know the potential dangers of marijuana or with cocaine or heroin or other drugs. That knowledge is available if you want to know. There's a great deal written on it. You don't have to be ignorant of the psychological harm and the dangers of pre-marital sex and homosexual activity. The damaged and misdirected lives, the hurt and confused children, the broken marriages, the heartaches, the fears, regrets and the sorrows are all part of the public record.

God then goes on to say in verse 22: "How long will you simple ones love simplicity? And scorners delight in scorning?" Another translation puts it this way: "How long will cynics like to be cynical?" Now God is trying to give the youth the knowledge they need to have through the church. Unfortunately some do pour scorn on it and they do become cynical.

Cynicism is one of the hallmarks of this age and unfortunately in God's church we have a number of young people who are cynical. In verse 24 the Good News Bible puts it like this: "I have been calling you and inviting you to come but you would not listen. You paid no attention to me. You have ignored all my advice and have not been willing to let me correct you." If you know the truth and you allow peer pressure to influence you to do wrong things then ultimately you pay a penalty. You may also possibly lose the birthright you have.

God continues on in verse 27: "When your terror comes like a storm and your distress and anguish come upon you, then they call on me, but I will not answer. They will seek me diligently but they will not find me." In other words when our dreams turn into nightmares, when our hopes become horrors, when what should be the terrific teens turn into the terrible teens we may find we've lost the birthright God has given us.

God gives us wonderful promises, tremendous privileges if we will keep His word, if we will live His way of life but if we turn away from it God says we will have to learn by bitter personal human experience that no one gets away with it.

There is a warning in the second last verse of the chapter. It says "for the turning away of the simple will slay them and the complacency of fools will destroy them." We do have a group of young adult singles in their 20's who have grown up in the church. They are no longer teenagers. They can be baptized if they want to. Peer pressure is not much of a problem for them anymore because they've grown out of that stage but they're complacent in doing what they know they should. They make all sorts of excuses like, "I want to escape the great tribulation but I don't want to do all the things a baptized member has to do like praying and studying and fasting.

That would be too much for me." Well, you see God says if we're complacent about what He is offering us we could lose what He is offering us.

At the end of the chapter after all of that God ends on a very positive note. He says:"Whoever listens to me will dwell safely and will be secure without any fear of evil." He will help guide your life for the very best and He is going to reward those who respect their parents and who stand up against peer pressure and all the other pressures a young person faces in this world.

**Remember, you're not alone in the struggle to stand up against drug abuse, illicit sexual behaviour and other harmful practices. There are times when it is right to say yes to good, fun and right activities. But there are also times when with firmness and tact you in your personal life should say no!**