

THE SILENCED MINORITY

PEER PRESSURE

taken from

Nehemiah 5:5



Buddy Dano, Pastor

Divine Viewpoint

www.divineviewpoint.com

November 1987

THE SILENCED MINORITY

PEER PRESSURE

"...So did not I, because of the fear of God," Nehemiah 5:15.

I don't think that the ordinary Bible reader knows very much about Nehemiah. He is one of the neglected, great men of Scripture. He was no prophet. He had no glowing words. He had no lofty vision. He had no special commission. He did not live in the heroic age.

Yet there is a certain harshness and a certain dryness, a tendency towards what, when it was more fully developed, became pharisaism, in the man, which somewhat covers the essential nobleness of his character. But he was brave, courageous, circumspect, disinterested, and he had Jerusalem in his heart.

The verse that we have chosen for this subject is a little fragment of his autobiography, which deals with a prosaic enough matter, but carries in it large principles.

When he was appointed governor of the little colony of returned exiles in Palestine, he found that his predecessors, like Turkish Pashas and Chinese Mandarins today, had been in the habit of "squeezing" the people of their government, and that they had requisitioned sufficient supplies or provisions to keep the governor's table well spread. It was the custom.

Nobody would have wondered if Nehemiah had conformed to it, but he felt that he must have his hands clean. **Why did he not do what everybody else had done in like circumstances?** His answer is beautifully simple. "BECAUSE OF THE FEAR OF GOD." **His Christianity went down into the little duties of common life, and imposed upon him a standard far above the maxims that were prevalent round about him. His peers, and peer pressure.**

And so, if you will take these words of his and disengage them from the smaller matter concerning which they were originally spoken, I think that you will find in them thoughts as to the attitude which we should take to prevalent practices, **the motive which should impel us to a sturdy non-compliance**, and the power which will enable us to walk on a solitary road. As Nehemiah said, "So did not I, because of the fear of God." Respect, awe for God.

Now here are three principles when it comes to our modern day peer pressure. **First, the mental attitude of prevalent practices.** Nehemiah would not conform. **Unless you can say, "No, no," and do it very often, your life will be shattered from the very beginning.** That non-compliance with customary maxims and practices is the beginning of, at least, one of the foundation stones of all nobleness and strength, of all blessedness and power.

Of course, it is utterly impossible for a man to denude himself of the influences that are brought to bear upon him by the circumstances in which he lives today, and the trend of opinion, and the maxims and practices of the world, in the corner, and at the time, in which his lot is cast.

But on the other hand, BE SURE OF THIS, THAT UNLESS YOU ARE IN A VERY DEEP AND NOT AT ALL A TECHNICAL SENSE OF THE WORD, "NON-CONFORMIST," YOU WILL COME TO NO GOOD. NONE, ABSOLUTELY NONE.

The command for being a non-conformist is found in Romans 12:2, "Be not conformed to this world system." **It is easy to do as others do, partly because of laziness, partly because of cowardice, partly because of the instinctive imitation which is in us all. Men are gregarious.**

One great teacher has drawn an illustration from a flock of sheep, and says that if we hold up a stick, and the first of the flock jumps over it, and then if we take away the stock, all the rest of the flock will jump when they come to the point where the first did so. **Herd bound.** It will save you a great deal of trouble, and it gratifies a certain strange instinct that is in all of us, and it avoids dangers and conflicts that we should do when we are at Rome, as the Romans do.

But Nehemiah says, "SO DO NOT I, BECAUSE OF THE RESPECT, AWE, FEAR OF GOD." Now as Christians, we must take this plain, simple principle of the necessity of non-compliance because, theoretically, we, most of us admit it, and apply it round the circumference of our lives. Apply it to your opinions. **There is no tyranny like the tyranny of a majority in a democratic country like ours.** It is quite as harsh as the tyranny of the old-fashioned despots. Unless you resolve to see steadfastly with your own eyes, to use your own brains, to stand on your own feet, **TO BE A VOICE, AND NOT AN ECHO, you will be helplessly enslaved by the fashion of the hour, and the opinions that prevail,** like whether everyone is doing it, or it is a so-called life style, or the fact that drugs and AIDS are to be condoned. John the Baptist was a voice.

"What everybody says" maybe is true. **What most say, at any given time, is very likely to be false.** TRUTH HAS ALWAYS LIVED WITH MINORITIES, so **do not let the current of widespread opinion sweep you away, but try to have a mind of your own,** and not to be brow-beaten or overborne because the majority of the people round about you are giving utterance, and it maybe unmeasured utterance to any opinions. A thousand million Frenchmen were wrong. **Majority doesn't mean that they are right.** It is just that majority rules. **But God always deals with the remnant.**

Now there is one direction to which we must emphasize this principle to the maximum and that is in regard to the attitude that so many are taking about Christian Truth. If

you have honestly thought out the subject to the best of your ability, and have come to some conclusions, diverse from those which are diverse from what the Word says, that is another matter.

I know that **in our day there is widespread fashion of unbelief.** So many influential men, leaders of opinion, teachers and even preachers, are giving up the old-fashioned evangelical faith, **that it takes a strong man to say that he is going to stick with the Word.** It is a poor reason to give for your attitude that unbelief is in the air, and that nobody believes those old doctrines now. That may be. There are currents of opinion that are transitory, and that is one of them. **DEPEND UPON IT. But at all events do not be fooled out of your faith, as some in our day are tending to be, for no better reason than because other people have given it up.**

An iceberg lowers the temperature all around it, and the iceberg of unbelief is among us today. It has chilled a great many people who could not tell why they have lost the fervor of their faith.

On the other hand, we must be reminded that that is a mere traditional religion, which is only orthodox because other people are so, and **has not verified its beliefs by personal experience,** is quite a deleterious as an imitative unbelief.

Maybe you are one of those who thinks that you haven't been affected by these currents of popular opinion, but whose unblemished and unquestioned orthodoxy has no more vitality in it than the other peoples' heterodoxy.

The one may says, "What is everywhere always, and by all believed, I believe." And the other man may say, "What the select spirits of the day disbelieve, I disbelieve." And the belief of one and the unbelief of the other are equally worthless and really identical. But it is not only, nor mainly, in reference to opinion that we are asking for this conformity in Christians, with prevalent practices as the measure of most that is noble in us.

But there is also no excuse for shady practices in your businesses today, that "It is the custom of the trade, and everybody is doing it."

Nehemiah might have said to you, "There never was a governor yet but took his 40 shekels a days worth, about 1800 English pounds, of your money, of provision from those poor people, and I am not going to give it up because of a scruple. It is the custom, and because it is the custom, I can do it." But there are people who hide this principle in their trade. And so we say "Come out in the open, and deal with the questions of morality involved in your commercial life, as you will have to deal with them hereafter by yourself." Never mind what other people, but you, say. That involves loss, very likely.

NEHEMIAH WAS A POORER MAN BECAUSE HE FED ALL THESE 150 JEWS AT HIS TABLE, BUT HE DID NOT MIND THAT. IT MAY INVOLVE LOSS, BUT YOU WILL KEEP GOD, AND THAT IS GAIN. IT IS EITHER GOD AT THE TABLE OR CONFORMITY, PEERS.

I will lose all my friends, but you won't lose God.

I won't be popular, but you are popular with God.

I won't have anyone to talk to, but you can talk to God anytime.

Now you can turn this searchlight of non-conformity to many directions. You may be starting a new career, or you are in college and there are those around you and the talk and the actions of them is startling at first to you. Do not be tempted to follow that multitude to do evil. Unless you are prepared to say "no" to a great deal that will be pushed in your face in this great city of Houston, as sure as you are living you will make shipwreck of your life.

In the some 25 years that I have stood before audiences and have seen the many, many faces of some who were buoyant, full of hope, full of high resolves, and with an almost mother's benediction hanging over their heads, and who got into a bad set, and had

not the strength to say "No," and then went down and down and down. And then someone asks "Where is so-n-so?" "Oh, his health broke down. And he has gone home to die. His bones are full of the iniquity of his youth, and he made shipwreck of the prospects of his life because he did not pull himself together when the temptation came and say, "So did not I, because of the fear of God."

NOW, IF YOU DON'T STAND FOR SOMETHING, YOU WILL FALL FOR ANYTHING. So we turn to that which we can stand on so that we won't fall for everything. **Before you can say "No," YOU HAVE TO SAY YES TO SOMETHING.** Here is the motivation for this sturdy non-compliance.

Nehemiah puts it for us in Old Testament phraseology, "THE FEAR OF GOD." In the New Testament it is "THE LOVE OF CHRIST." And if you want to take the power and the life out of both phrases, in order to find a modern conventional equivalent, you will say, Christianity. **The love of Christ impels to this non-compliance.**

JESUS CHRIST REQUIRES FROM EACH OF US THAT WE SHALL ABSTAIN, RESTRICT OURSELVES, REFUSE TO DO A GREAT MANY THINGS THAT ARE BEING DONE AROUND US TODAY. I need not remind you that He repeatedly speaks of taking up the cross. We need only to remind you of His parable of the two ways, but ask you, while you think of it, to note which He sets forth are given by Him as reasons for refusing the one and walking in the other.

For example, "Enter ye in at the strait gate, for strait is the gate." That is a reason for going in. "And narrow the way." That is a reason for going in. "Wide is the gate." That is the reason for not going in. "And broad is the way." That is the reason for not going in. "AND MANY THERE BE THAT GO IN THEREAT." And that is the reason for not going in.

This is what we said before, which is not very popular today, that **the minority is generally right, and the majority is wrong.** JUST BECAUSE THERE ARE SO MANY

PEOPLE ON THE PATH, SUSPECT IT, AND EXPECT THAT THE PATH WITH FEWER TRAVELLERS IS PROBABLY THE BETTER AND THE HIGHER PATH. “NOT MANY MIGHTY, NOT MANY NOBLE ARE CALLED, but God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise.”

What did Jesus Christ mean by His continual contrast between His disciples and the world? What did He mean by “the world?” This fair universe, with all its possibilities of help and blessing, and all its educational influences? By no means, He meant by the “world” the aggregate of things and man considered as separate from God. And when He applied the terms to men only, He meant by it very much what we mean when we talk about society. Society is not organized on Christian principles. We well know that, and until it is, if a man is going to be a Christian, he must not conform to the world.

“Know ye not that whosoever is a friend of the world is an enemy of God?” “You cannot serve God and mammon, too. For you will love one and hate the other.” **This means that our Christianity is nothing unless it leads us to a standard, and a course of conduct in conformity with the standard which will be in diametrical opposition to a great deal of what is patted on the back, and petted and praised by society.**

Now there is an easy going king of Christianity which does not recognize that, and which is in great favor with many people today, and it is called “Liberality and breadth and conciliating and commending Christianity to others,” and I know not what besides.

Well, Christ’s Words seem to me to come like a hammer upon that sort of thing. Depend upon it, “the world,” I mean by that the aggregate of godless men organized as they are in society, does not think much of these trimmers. **It may dislike an out and out Christian, but it knows him when it sees him, and it has a kind of hostile respect for him which the other people will never get.**

Maybe you remember the story of the man that was looking for a coachman, and whose question to each applicant was, “How near can you drive to the edge of a precipice?” He took the one man who said, “I would keep away from it as far as I could.”

And the so-called Christian people that seem to be bent on showing how much their lives can be made to assimilate to the lives of men that have no sympathy with their creeds, are like the rash jehus that tried to go as near the edge as they could.

But the constant Christian will keep as far away from it as he can. Christ said, through the lips of His apostle, what He often said in another language by His own lips when He was here on Earth, “Be ye not conformed to the world.” **Surely such a command as that, just because it involves difficulty, self-restraint, self-denial, and sometimes self-crucifixion, ought to appeal and does appeal, to all that is noble in humanity,** in a fashion that that smooth and easy going Gospel of living on the level of the people around us never can do. **For remember that Christ’s commandment not to be conformed to the world is the consequence of His commandment to be conformed to Himself.** “This did not I,” comes second. “This one thing I do,” comes first. You will misunderstand the whole genius of the Gospel if you suppose that, as law of life, it is perpetually pulling men short up, and saying, “Don’t, don’t, don’t.”

There is a Christianity of that sort which is mainly prohibition and restriction, but it is not Christ’s Christianity. He begins by enjoining, “This do in remembrance of Me,” and the man that accepted that commandment must necessarily say, as he looks out on the world, and its practices, “SO DID NOT I, BECAUSE OF THE FEAR OF GOD.”

Not only do we have the motive, fear of God, which impels to this non-conformity, non-compliance, **but we also have the power which enables us to exercise it.** “The fear of God” or “the love of Christ” makes it possible for a man, with all his

weaknesses and dependence on surroundings, with all his instinctive desire to be like the people that are near him, his peers, to take that brave attitude, and to refuse to be one of the crowd that runs after evil and lies.

Christ will enable you to take the necessary attitude, because in Christ He gives you the example which is always safe to follow. The instinct of imitation is planted in us for a good end, and because it is in us, examples of nobility appeal to us. And because it is in Jesus Christ, He has lived the life that it is possible for, and therefore incumbent on us to live, it is safe to imitate Him. **It is easy not to do as men do, if once, our main idea is to do as Christ did.**

Christ makes it possible for us, because He gives us the strongest possible motive for the life that He prescribes. As the apostle put it, “Ye are bought with a price, be not the servants of men.” There is nothing that will so deliver us from the tyranny of majorities, and of what we call general opinion, or peer pressure, and ordinary custom, **as to feel that we belong to the Lord because He died for us.**

Men become very indignant when Christ speaks, and the charter for our freedom from them lies in our redemption by the blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, being our Redeemer, is our Judge. And moment by moment He is estimating our conduct and judging our actions as they are done. **With me it is a very small matter to be judged of you, or of man’s judgment. But He that judgeth me is the Lord.**

NEVER MIND WHAT PEOPLE AROUND YOU SAY. YOU DO NOT TAKE YOUR ORDERS FROM THEM. AND YOU DO NOT ANSWER TO THEM. Like some ambassador appointed by the government, you do not report to the local authorities. You report to headquarters. **What the Lord thinks about you is the ONLY important thing.** We are His ambassadors, His witnesses. We represent Him. So the fear of man which bringeth a snare, dwindles down into very minute dimensions when we think of the “pattern,” the Redeemer, and the Judge to whom we give account.

So if you will open your hearts by quiet, humble faith, for Jesus Christ to be formed in your lives, then you will be able to resist, to refuse compliance, to stand firm, though alone. The servant of Jesus Christ is the master of all men. “All things are yours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, all are yours, and ye are Christ’s.” “To his own master he stands or falls.” “For me and mine we will serve the Lord.”

SAY YES TO CHRIST SO
THAT YOU CAN SAY NO TO
THE COSMOS.

Buddy Dano, Pastor

Divine Viewpoint

www.divineviewpoint.com