

Class 3
Week of June 29, 2026



The Idol of Approval: Breaking Free from People-Pleasing

The Weariness of the Mask

We live in an era of hyper-curated identities. Every day, we subconsciously ask ourselves: *What do I need to wear, say, or do to make sure the people around me approve of me?*

We become emotional chameleons. Around our coworkers, we wear one mask. Around our family, another. Around our church friends, yet another. But changing masks constantly is exhausting. When you try to be everything to everyone, you end up being nothing to anyone. You lose the unique identity God gave you.

Our modern culture tells us that doing this is just part of being a "nice" person. But if you look at the history of language, that word carries a hidden warning. The word "**nice**" originally comes from an Old French word that literally meant "**ignorant**" or "**foolish**." Historically, to be "nice" meant playing dumb, pretending you didn't have knowledge, and intentionally staying quiet so you wouldn't cause trouble. It meant choosing to stand for absolutely nothing just to keep the peace.

The Bible has a much sharper term for this mindset. It doesn't call it a harmless personality trait or a polite social skill. It calls it a snare, and it identifies human approval as a counterfeit god.

The Core Problem: The Snare of the Fear of Man

Let's look at the absolute clearest warning in Scripture regarding this struggle:

Proverbs 29:25 (KJV)

"The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe."

Notice the word **snare**. A snare is a hidden trap used by hunters. An animal steps into it willingly, looking for bait, but suddenly the trap snaps shut, locking it in place and stripping away its freedom.

When we live for the applause of others, we step into a spiritual snare. We give people a power over us that belongs only to God. We let their opinions dictate our joy, our security, and our decisions. The Apostle Paul understood that you cannot serve two masters. He confronted this directly in his letter to the Galatians:

Galatians 1:10 (KJV)

"For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."

Paul lays down a brutal line in the sand. People-pleasing and serving Christ are mutually exclusive. Why? Because eventually, God will ask you to do something, say something, or stand for something that the world—or even your friend group—will thoroughly dislike. If human approval is your ultimate goal, you will always betray God to protect your reputation.

The Root of the Idol: Pride in Disguise

We often excuse our people-pleasing by saying, *"I'm just a helper,"* or *"I just hate conflict."* But if we are completely honest, people-pleasing is actually a sneaky form of pride and manipulation.

We try to control what other people think of us so we can feel secure. We use people as mirrors to tell us we are smart, attractive, successful, or holy. The Gospel of John exposes a group of leaders who believed in Jesus but refused to speak up because they loved the mirror of public applause more than the light of God:

John 12:42–43 (KJV)

"Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

They bartered eternal truth for temporary social status. When we bow to the idol of approval, we do the exact same thing. We value the fickle, changing opinions of flawed humans over the unchanging verdict of the Creator of the universe.

Jesus gave a terrifying warning about the emptiness of a life built purely on a good reputation and public agreement:

Luke 6:26 (KJV)

"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets."

We must understand that this verse is not exclusive to social popularity out in the secular world. It applies directly to how we handle the Word of God. The false prophets were not hated because they told people what they *wanted* to hear; they were celebrated because they twisted scripture to stroke the human ego rather than conflicting with it.

When you read the Bible and it only ever makes you feel comfortable, self-righteous, and validated in your own opinions, you aren't listening to God—you are worshiping yourself. God's Word is designed to drastically conflict with the flesh. If your theology never offends you, never corrects you, and never demands that you crucify your natural desires, then you have crafted a false god out of your own approval.

Biblical Examples of the Trap

The Bible gives us vivid case studies of what happens when leaders succumb to this idol. Consider King Saul. God gave him a clear command, but Saul bent to peer pressure:

1 Samuel 15:24 (KJV)

"And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice."

Saul lost his kingship because he feared his army more than he feared his God.

Look at Pontius Pilate in the New Testament. He knew Jesus was completely innocent. Yet, look at what drove his final execution order:

Mark 15:15 (KJV)

"And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified."

The crowd demanded blood, and Pilate sacrificed an innocent man on the altar of political survival and public approval. When we let the "crowd" dictate our morals, we end up crucifying our convictions.

The Antidote: Working for an Audience of One

Breaking a lifelong addiction to human approval is not a matter of positive thinking or simple self-help. It requires a cold, hard look at reality. You have to accept that you cannot control what people think of you. No matter how perfectly you behave, how much you sacrifice, or how quiet you keep, someone is still going to misjudge you, dislike you, or talk about you behind your back. The sooner you stop trying to manage their opinions, the sooner you can stop living in exhaustion.

The biblical antidote to this madness is to radically shift who you are trying to satisfy. Jesus or your self? You are secure. When you anchor your mind in that reality, the whispers of your critics and the fair-weather applause of the crowd lose their power to break you.

The Apostle Paul gave the Colossians a blunt, everyday strategy to pull their hearts out of the comparison trap:

Colossians 3:23–24 (KJV)

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ."

When you switch your focus to the Audience of One, you find a deep, unshakeable stability. The Psalmist described this freedom beautifully:

Psalm 118:6 (KJV)

"The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?"

What *can* they do? They can criticize you, misjudge you, or unfriend you—but they cannot touch your inheritance, they cannot alter your identity, and they cannot remove you from the palm of God's hand. As Romans reminds us:

Romans 8:31 (KJV)

"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"

The Call to Action: Drop the Key

Bitterness and people-pleasing lock us in a cage. But the Gospel drops the key.

Jesus did not die on the cross to make us popular; He died to make us free. This week, identify where the snare is catching you.

- Is it a conversation where you need to say an honest "no" instead of a resentful "yes"?
- Is it a habit of filtering your life online to get likes from people you don't even respect?

Step out of the trap. Rid yourself of the idol of approval. Let's close with the words of Peter when he was pressured by the highest authorities of his day to stay quiet:

Acts 5:29 (KJV)

"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."