

Fresh Start

By Jerry Bader

Human Praise vs. Praise From God

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"...many even among the leaders believed in Him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God." John 12:42-43

It's been just less than two years since I became a Christ-follower and something that continues to surprise me is how many "closeted" Christ-followers there are in my life. After my radio career ended a lot of longtime friends reached out. I shared my faith conversion with all of them. Several of them responded with; "I was saved back in..." They would then share their conversion story and the strong relationship they have with Christ. These were people who never considered sharing their stories with me...until I shared mine with them.

Just like the first century Jews in the featured verse above, many Christ-followers today don't openly express their faith for fear of alienating others. Peter famously denied Jesus three times (as Jesus predicted) and it might seem remarkable that someone who walked with Christ for three years could do such a thing. Yet how often do we do the very same thing?

Yes, we want to guard against being "in someone's face" about our faith. Proselytizing to strangers is one thing. But being willing to share your faith with someone with whom you already have a relationship is another.

Does the thought of praying aloud over a meal in a restaurant make you uncomfortable? Does simply telling someone you will pray for them if they share a problem with you feel awkward to you? I know someone who shares her battles with anxiety on social media. She once tweeted about how difficult the battle was on that particular day. I sent her a direct message telling her I know several people who battle with anxiety, shared my faith and asked if I could pray for her. I had no idea whether she was a believer or not. Her response: *"My own faith is complicated, but one thing I never question is the power of prayer and sending good thoughts into the world. Thank you for adding me to your prayers. I'm touched by that."*

I continue to pray that she defeats her anxiety issues. I knew that her reaction to my bringing my faith into the conversation could have been different. But I seldom hesitate to do so these days. When such opportunities present themselves, I am reminded of the Great Commission in Acts 1:8: *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

Sometimes that commission may sound more daunting than it really is. It might mean a calling to missionary or ministry work. Or it might mean following the Holy Spirit's prompting to use relationships you have to reflect Christ. I am reminded of the contemporary Christian group Newsboys hit song "Guilty." It goes, in part:

If saying "I believe" is out of line
If I'm judged 'cause I'm gonna give my life
To show the world the love that fills me