

The Praise of Man is a Snare

Every decision we take in life is a step forward. Contrary to popular adages, we never step backwards. How so? Every time you take a step, you are advancing in one direction or the other, but the problem oftentimes lies in the direction we choose to take. For example, if you choose to fight your way through life, you will advance into darkness until you become an advanced fighter. If you choose to praise your way into the very presence of God, you will advance towards the throne of God until the very power of God radiates through your being. Whichever path you choose for yourself is the direction you are advancing in, but it goes without saying that the wrong direction leads to destruction. It's hard for people on the wrong paths to fathom the idea that the journeys they are taking are leading them away from God and towards their own graves. That's because each path that's presented for us has what we all perceive to be pros and cons. On the wrong path, a person may see mindsets and skillsets that they consider to be worth the journeys and, at the same time, people will celebrate you regardless of what direction you choose if you're good at something. For example, let's go back to the fighting example. Let's say that a guy named Ronnie decided he wanted to take up martial arts, and he wanted to be so skilled in the arena of martial arts that he begins to study and meditate on Eastern mysticism, which, of course, is the origin of martial arts. Ronnie becomes a devout follower of this pagan practice, nevertheless, he still considers himself to be a Christian because he goes to church every Sunday and he refrains from many of the behaviors the bible labels as evil. Since God doesn't allow us to be double-minded or lukewarm, Ronnie unknowingly has chosen the path he will take, but the more skilled Ronnie becomes in martial arts, the harder it will be to evangelize him. That's because anytime we become skilled at something, we begin to see that thing as a part of who we are. We begin to identify ourselves by our skills and talents. Asking Ronnie to give up Eastern mysticism and dedicate himself wholly to God, to Ronnie, may come off as asking him to go back to being a faceless individual with no identity and no way to stand out from the crowd who once overlooked him. For Ronnie to give up his sinful ways, he'd have to find his true identity, and to find out who he is, he'd have to get to know God all the more. For this reason, Ronnie would have to make a sacrifice, and that sacrifice is: Ronnie would have to die to who he is skilled at being so that who he really is can rise up and live. Needless to say, it would still be very hard to evangelize him because people tend to stand firmly in the mindsets and places that they were celebrated in the most. That's why some teenagers peak in high school. The class clown often goes through life trying to make people laugh, placing himself or herself at the mercy of others. The homecoming queen may go through life reliving her glory days, even after her beauty has faded and genetics has taken an unfavorable toll on her once curvaceous body.

Today, a lot of people are posting up videos hoping to go viral. Most of these individuals don't know who they are in Christ, so they've found something they're good or skilled at, and they're trying to gain notoriety in those areas. There's a problem with this, however. Wherever you are mentally and spiritually when people notice and celebrate you, that's the place you'll likely anchor yourself in. That's

because you've chosen a label and the crowd has accepted and celebrated you with that label, causing you to finally accept yourself. Nevertheless, you wouldn't be accepting who you are in Christ; you'd be accepting who people want you to be. A good example is a woman who discovers that one of her talents is painting. Now, in Christ, she may be a powerful and talented prophetess whose paintings are nothing more than avenues God has opened for her to share His messages through. The woman is lost and has not truly found her way back to God, but her God-given talents are still very much present in her, so she begins to paint pictures of events to come. Her paintings are powerful, detailed and full of hidden messages that reveal themselves to those who have eyes to see them. People start to take notice of her work, and before long, she's revered as a gifted painter. No one sees or recognizes that God is speaking through her, so they credit her for everything she does, and she begins to identify herself the very way her fans and customers are identifying her. If her family, friends or church staged an intervention and tried to get her to understand that God wants the glory and she is more than just a painter, she would likely label them all as jealous and disassociate herself from them.

Of course, Satan knows how to keep both men and women from being all they're designed to be, so one of his weapons against an anxious soul is encouraging that individual to chase success at the expense of getting to know God more. He knows that anytime we study the Word and get to know the heart of God, we slowly begin to stumble upon our own identities, along with other gifts and talents. The more we know God, the more we'll love Him, and the more we love Him, the more we'll seek to serve Him in everything we do. Nevertheless, when we aren't mature Christians, the enemy uses every opportunity available to him to encourage us to seek whatever selfish pleasures we've allowed to overwhelm our thoughts. An immature, single woman of God may identify herself as nothing more than some man's wife in waiting, so instead of seeking to know God more, she will seek a husband. An immature man of God may identify himself as some woman's blessing, so it wouldn't be unusual to find him dating every single Christian woman at his church. If he's celebrated as the church's playboy, he will likely seek to uphold that title by refusing to marry any woman he dates, regardless of how Godly she is. He's not seeking marriage; he's seeking to maintain a label, and people like this are in desperate need of deliverance.

The message here is clear. Don't seek to be celebrated where you are; seek the kingdom of God and all God's righteousness. He'll add everything else to you. One of the worst things that can happen to an anointed and powerful child of God is for that individual to get celebrated in mediocrity and begin to deny the full power of who they really are simply because they've come to love the praise of man. Please know that wherever people celebrate you, that is the place that they'll oftentimes attempt to restrict you to. That's why it's better to deny man-made opportunities that point towards man's ideal of success in order and allow the seasons to pass because when God lifts you up, no man has the power to bring you down. Don't seek the applause of man; it is, has been and will continue to be a snare. Seek the heart of God, and when the seasons are fulfilled and God grants you access to who you really are, He is going to bless you with far greater than any man would have ever offered you. Nevertheless, if

you let man give it to you, please know that man has the right to take it away from you.

John 12:42-43: 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.