

Our Desire for Popularity: the Urge of Conformity

Driving from our home in Indiana back to East Texas, Donna and I always know we're getting close to our destination when we start seeing cows in the fields and log trucks on the roadways. They don't call it the "Piney Woods" for nothing! Though not quite as numerous, another clue that our journey is nearing its end is the appearance of chicken trucks. At one point in my youth, our home county was ranked among the top three in the nation for broiler (chickens raised specifically for meat) production. So we grew up amid lots cows, tall trees, and chicken farms!

All of that to get to one thing I'd like you to consider about the hatchlings (baby chickens) that are stock by the hundreds of thousands in those houses: Though they look so cute, sweet, soft, and cuddly, they are absolutely brutal to each other! Any chick that is smaller, weaker, or just looks a little different from the rest will be mercilessly pecked to death by the "normal" ones. Before the "nature" of juvenile baby chickens upsets you too much, please realize we humans **do the same kind thing!**

Think carefully about this question: **Which kids get "picked on" and "bullied" at school, or anywhere there are significant groups of children?** Is it not those that are *small for their age*, those that are perceived to have a *weakness* of some sort, or those that simply *look or act differently* than the other children? Why do we, like chickens, behave this way?

Call it the "herd/flock mentality" and blame it on nature if you like, but from a young age we teach our children the importance of being "like" and "liked" by everyone else. We make sure to buy them the "popular" (aka, "just like everyone else has") *toys, clothes, shoes*, and when they start school, the same *backpacks, supplies*, (and heaven help us) *phones!* After all, we don't want them to "different," do we? If they're not "like everyone else," they might get picked on! Sound familiar? In this regard at least, we're like chickens. However, our little ones don't single out and abuse those who look or act different via genetics like chickens do, **we teach them** (in our case, its *nurture* not *nature*)! Because **we** value being "like everyone else" and "having what everyone else has," we **teach them** to do the same. We may do so subconsciously rather than consciously, but we do it nonetheless. We don't want to be "different" from the world, and we don't want them to be "different" either.

Obviously, this mindset and its obligatory actions are nothing new. Israel wanted a king to be "*like all the nations*" around them," 1Samuel 8:5,20. And, despite repeated warnings from God through Moses and Joshua to the contrary, Israel left idolatrous Canaanites in the land instead of annihilating or driving them out as commanded. The ultimate result was that Israel "*did according to all their* (the Canaanites') *detestable things*" which they did "*for their gods*," Deuteronomy 20:18. What was the primary reason for this apostasy? Israel just didn't want to be "different" from those around them, and neither do we.

The urge for *conformity* and *popularity* is strong. Our desires to be "liked" by the world, whether we are taught it by our parents or develop it all on our own, must be admitted, faced, and overcome. We must not be "*conformed to this world*" but "*transformed by the renewing*" of our minds, Romans 12:2. For, as Paul asked in 2Corinthians 6:15, "*what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?*" Little to nothing. We must, therefore, "*Come out from their midst and be separate*" for God to "*welcome*" us as His "*sons and daughters*," 2Corinthians 6:16-18.

What are you teaching your children about *conformity, popularity*, and being *different* from the world? Does your own example (both in *values* and *actions*) confirm or deny what you teach them? Neither you nor your children have to be "like" or "liked" by the world- in fact, such surely signals a problem, cf. Luke 6:26; Jn.15:19. Have the courage to not only be different yourself, but teach your children the value also... and start NOW before it's too late! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)