

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

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Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with peer pressure. The Scriptures warn: **“Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit” (Ex. 23:2-3).** A classic case of peer pressure perverting justice is the crucifixion of Christ. Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent. He stated over and over **“I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death” (Lk. 23:14-15).** Pilate's wife even warned him **“don't have anything to do with this innocent man” (Matt. 27:19).** Sadly, **“Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified” (Mk. 15:15).** Then, in a feeble attempt to salve his own conscience, Pilate **“took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man's blood’. He said. ‘It is your responsibility’” (Matt. 27:24).**

Pilate washing his hands is perhaps the most famous thing he ever did. It is the focus of Christian art down through the ages. It is doubtful that even Pilate himself truly believed such a stunt would make him innocent in the eyes of God. In a desperate attempt to be popular, however, he yielded to the will of the people and crucified Christ. Sadly, it is still possible to crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame (Heb. 6:6).

There is sense in which every thinking person intuitively knows there is a God! The book of Romans, for example, states that the invisible qualities of God are clearly seen and understood through creation (Rom. 1:20). As someone has said: “There is a God shaped vacuum in every human heart”. Truly **“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Ps. 14:1).**

Sir Alfred Jules Ayer is quite interesting in this regard. He was one of the 20th century's most prominent atheists. He once said that he was absolutely sure there was no God and no afterlife. After graduating from Oxford, and at the age of 26 he gained a measure of fame as a philosopher by publishing a book on philosophy. He served in British intelligence during WWII, and afterwards taught at both Oxford and London Universities. In 1988, at the age of 77, Ayer came down with a serious case of pneumonia while traveling in the United States. After 10 days in the hospital, he felt well enough to make it back to England. Soon after arriving in England, however, he suffered a relapse and was rushed to the hospital. After about a week, he seemed to be improving until he choked on a piece of salmon. Hospital attendants immediately rushed in to save him, but they were too late. His heart had completely stopped. They kept working on him, however, and after about four minutes his heart started beating again. Doctors feared he had might have suffered brain damage from the episode, so everyone was relieved when he eventually regained consciousness and was able to speak normally.

Something significant, however, happened to this famous atheist during those four minutes. Ayers later wrote about this experience in an article titled: *“What I saw when I was dead”*. You can Google this if you are interested. Among other things he said he saw a bright light that was responsible for the government of the universe. He even told his doctor that he had seen a divine being and would have to revise all of his books and opinions. His commitment to atheism and his atheistic friends, however, convinced him to repudiate what he had experienced and what he had written in his article. Like Pontius Pilate he caved to peer pressure, denied his experience, and died in unbelief in 1989.

Many years ago Candid Camera was a popular TV program produced by Allen Funt. It has been shown from 1948 to 2014. One of his most popular programs dates back to 1962 and provides insight into the power of peer pressure. Candid Camera rigged cameras so that viewers could watch what happened on an elevator. Four paid actors set the trap. When the unsuspecting victim entered the elevator the four actors all turned and faced the rear. When the doors opened the unsuspecting passenger had dutifully conformed to peer pressure and also faced the rear. Then the door closed and reopened again. This time everyone was facing sideways. The next time the actors did an about face and faced in the opposite direction. In each instance the unsuspecting victim was manipulated like a puppet to do what everyone else was doing.

Another similar scenario involved a construction site with a trumped up sign reading “backwards zone”. Again, actors paid by Candid Camera set the example by dutifully turning around and walking backward when they came to the sign. Predictably, the unsuspecting victim mindlessly turned around and also walked backward just as everyone else did. Peer pressure often turns mindless people into puppets. In 1964 Cornell University asked for and received permission to maintain an archive of Candid Camera programs for educational purposes. We can learn from them too!

Just think how embarrassing it will be on Judgement Day when our accuser, the devil, drags out videos of us showing the stupid things we did just because everyone else was doing it. As in the case of Pontius Pilate and Sir Alfred Jules Ayer, what we believe and what we deny have eternal significance.

Please dare to be a Daniel, take an unequivocal stand for God and do not be intimidated by pressure from your peers.

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce