

The Martyr's Plight

(Part 2 of a 5-part series)

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Pleasing is a common attitude, especially in times of conflict.

Pleasing is the polar opposite of self-sacrifice. Where self-sacrifice is the act of wholeheartedly giving up oneself for the good of another, pleasing is giving up to others to create an illusion of good while the heart remains wholly angry.

Scripture has a number of examples of pleasing: Moses' wife, Zipporah tried to "please" God (Exodus 4:24-26), Job's wife tried to sway him to "please" God (Job 2:9), and Martha tried to please everyone in the house (Luke 10:40). In each instance the heart is angry, the behaviour is sorrowful, and the purpose is self-centred.

Pleasers usually act sad, timid, tired, and are often diagnosed as "depressed"—the result of expending massive energy to suppress their anger. They either don't have the resources to achieve the life they want, or they've given up trying. They allow things to happen to them until they "die inside"—mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. In extreme cases, they harm themselves to release pain, or become suicidal because they see no other way out of their situation.

The choices and actions of pleasing are a form of bartering, to "trade" for the love of others—and pleasers will often say it: "I did this for you, so why can't you...?"

In marriages and families where there's a spouse or parent who blames, the other spouse (most often the wife) or at least one child is likely to be a pleaser. They are the "peacekeepers" of the family unit, who intervene in any situation by yielding to the whims, desires, and anger of the others.

Bullying is a common situation that creates pleasers. In order to survive mentally, emotionally, or physically, a bullied individual gives in to an insecure person's self-proclaimed "authority" (usually enforced by coercion).

Scripture doesn't leave room for pleasing: "Wives, submit to your husbands" but husbands who truly love their wives won't give them reason to become a "pleaser" and will pick their wives up when they're down.

"Children, obey your parents" but parents who don't provoke their children won't give them reason for becoming "pleasers", and will encourage growth (Colossians 3).

“Be subject to the governing authorities” (Romans 13:1) and “lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (1 Timothy 2:2b) isn’t being a “pleaser,” but don’t submit to laws or edicts in contradiction to the Word (Acts 5:29) or you become one!

A pleaser bows down to a person or self-proclaimed godless authority; ultimately it’s a selfish attitude. Submission is to a person’s God-given position of authority, not the person; ultimately it’s obedience to God.

While someday we may be called to be martyrs and give everything we have—our opinions, our possessions, our “rights,” even our lives—for Christ, we should never become pleasers, bowing down to unrighteousness and godlessness to save ourselves from trouble.

If you’re stuck in a pattern of pleasing, find help to follow the path of healing: submit to God, resist the devil, and draw near to God (James 4:7). You can live free!

Charles and Charlene are counsellors/life coaches in private practice in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Join them for one of their many workshops—visit www.ccsg.com for details.