

R.T. Kendall: I Still Struggle With This Temptation—And You Probably Do Too

Would you like to be famous? If honest, most of us would. But famous where? What if you walked into a party in Buckingham Palace and as you entered, you overheard the queen whisper to the person she was speaking to: “Oh look, it’s ... “? Or perhaps you imagine listening in on a conversation in the Oval Office and hear the president mention your name: “Oh yes, I know ... he/she is quite something!” Would that make you feel good? Or how about this: Imagine there is a meeting in hell—millions of demons are present, and the devil himself is working the room. Suddenly you hear him mention a name—your name. At first you are a little surprised—even a little afraid. But then you remember that some other names are known there too. The demon said to the imposter in Acts 19:15b: “I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?” And suddenly you realize something that at last convinces you that your life has made a difference in the battle between good and evil. You are one of a select group: You are famous in hell.

Being famous in hell is quite something. But on its own, it’s not enough. John Paul Jackson was best known for his prophetic gift. He and I became close friends. One day I phoned him to say, “I have a sermon for a church this Sunday, but I don’t think it will be very popular with them.”

He replied, “Will it be popular in heaven? If it will be popular in heaven, that’s the only thing that matters.”

My dear reader, life is short. The things that grasp our attention now will one day seem like mere trinkets. Every day

we breathe—in and out—in and out thousands of times a day. There is a day fixed, that unless Jesus comes first, you and I will only breathe out. No amount of money, power, or prestige can alter the date that we each have with death. And at that moment, the only thing that will matter is whether we have known Christ and served Him well—that our lives have made a difference. In short: that we are popular in heaven—and famous in hell.

Recently, an old classmate of 1953 from Ashland High School in Kentucky loaned me his copy of the annual, which contains photographs of all the students of that year and write-ups and photos of the more popular students at the time. It was both fun and sobering. Fun to see what I looked like then as well as old friends I have not seen in many years. Sobering because these photos brought me right back to those days when I was conscious of not being very popular. My former church teaching prohibited me from attending cinemas and school dances. I was never “in” with the popular students. My photo is found only when I was in a group such as the high school band.

Popularity in school was of paramount importance—then. Oh yes. Peer pressure dominated how one felt. You dressed not to be criticized. You dressed in a manner that might bring compliments. You spoke when it would be accepted by those who heard you. You did not always consciously think about it, but you wanted to be liked. You wanted to be “in.” There was a time when I cared more about what my parents thought. But at some stage, their views and approval were pretty much eclipsed by what my classmates in school thought. What fellow students thought became more important than what my parents thought, what my pastor thought, or what any authority figure thought. What mattered was what those of my age thought. It was totally embarrassing not to go to the cinema or the school dances. Even buying a class ring was out of the question; it was regarded as “worldly” by my church. But peer relationships were what seemed so important.

If only I could have realized then how little these things would mean one day! When I preach to young people nowadays, I try to make this point. I'm not sure whether many take it in. The influence of peer pressure on young people is so great. It controls so many decisions they make, who they go out with, who they are seen with. One day these influences will mean nothing.

These things said, I blush to admit that I have not changed much in the past 70 years! My initial reaction in my life and ministry is still based upon "what they think." I am ashamed to say that I still think of the same things—what my friends and foes might think or say, whether what I preach or write will be applauded; will it make new enemies or will it endear me to those who already accept me?

Here's my consolation when I contemplate my embarrassing weakness after these 70 years: there is a difference between temptation and sin. I thank God for this distinction. I am embarrassed by what tempts me—to be popular on this earth—but I remember that Jesus was tempted as we are. He did not sin (Heb. 4:15). The question is: Do we accept the grim reality of what tempts us and reject this temptation? Or do we give in to it?

We do not outgrow temptations in this life, no matter how spiritual, godly, experienced or seasoned we become. Neither will we be perfectly like Jesus on this earth. Paul admitted that he wasn't perfect yet (Phil. 3:13). That is what glorification is for!

Jesus never outgrew temptation. He was tested to the hilt right up to the final moments of His death on the cross. Partly what kept Him focused was that the reward was worth waiting for. "For the joy that was set before Him" Jesus "endured the cross" and scorned "its shame" (Heb. 12:2).

Therefore we must learn to resist temptation. That includes

the temptation for someone like me to write or preach what will please the readers or hearers.

Is being popular important to you? Being famous? Being well connected?

The early disciples were derided. But they were famous for having been with Jesus. Being well connected like that is as good as it gets.

✖ *Adapted from Popular in Heaven Famous in Hell by R.T. Kendall, copyright 2018, published by Charisma House. In this book the author admonishes you to stop valuing your reputation with people more than with God. It will help you make spiritual decisions based on what God thinks and not man. To order your copy click on this link.*

Prayer Power, Week of Dec. 10, 2018

This week, take inventory of your motivation for service and ask God to help you have pure motives for His glory and not your own. Remember those suffering losses during this Christmas season. Pray for the Bush family as they and the nation grieve the loss of former President George H.W. Bush. Continue to pray for our military and their families, as well as our allies and leaders. Read Acts 4:13, 19:15; Philippians 3:13; Hebrews 4:15, 12:2.