

Is It Ever Right to Please People?

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Date: 09 September 2007

Preacher: Karel Boonzaayer

[0:00] Good morning. If you would all just humor me for a minute and everybody stand, please.

! If you remember what you had for breakfast this morning, remain standing.! So far, so good. How about yesterday morning? How about a week ago today?

Come on, you can't all be eating oatmeal every morning. You are. Okay, how about two weeks ago today? Come on. What's up with these memories?

All right, three weeks ago today, what did you have for breakfast? Pancakes. Every morning, do you? Well, the fact that you remember what you had every morning doesn't count that you remember that particular breakfast. Let's everybody sit down.

You know, it doesn't really matter what you had for breakfast this morning or last Tuesday morning or three Sundays ago if you're Chuck and you had pancakes. You broke the fast that morning and your body took nourishment and you went on till lunch and that meal served its purpose.

[1:22] And so in some way today, this morning, we're breaking the fast. We are here gathered around the Word. We want to hear from God. It says, God tells us in Isaiah 55, Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.

He who has no money, come buy and eat. Come and buy wine and milk without money and price. Why do you labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me and eat what is good and delight yourselves in rich food.

So the point of that exercise really was to say, you know, in the past when we were covering the Psalms, I mean, it's kind of a silo.

You're covering a Psalm and it doesn't really matter so much if you come to the next Sunday and you don't remember what was covered the last time. But this time, in this series, I think it's far more important that we remember from week to week what we're covering.

Just because of the nature of the book, it's a book, it's a series, it builds from chapter to chapter. So I'm encouraging you to buy the book. If you can, I'm going to coordinate a book order.

[2:29] If you want a book, see me, and I'll be collating those and placing an order. But also in service of that, I've taken this from last week.

I talked this over with the other two teachers and they were at least not opposed to me issuing a quiz from material last week. So that's what you have in front of you. On this side, it's kind of fuzzy. But what I want to do is actually take the time to do the quiz right here and now. So you should have the paper and I think pencils were handed out. So everybody should have something to write with and write on.

The rating scale is there in the upper left. I'm just going to read the question and just go with your gut feel and write down a number and move on. Let's not agonize over each question here.

You can do that later at home. So give yourself a five if the statement is never or hardly ever true of you. Four for seldom, three sometimes, two frequently, and one for always or almost always.

[3:35] So here we go. Everybody ready? Anybody need something to write with or write on?

Okay. Number one, I listen with anxious attentiveness when others discuss that which pleases or displeases them.

I strive to be politically correct more than biblically correct. I like to go fishing for compliments. I gossip about others to people whom I believe will be pleased with me for giving them such luscious tidbits of information.

My desire for a good reputation is predominantly based on how such a reputation will benefit me, rather than how the reputation will serve as a means to a greater end, such as the glory of God, the good of others, or some other unselfish objective.

I value the approval of certain individuals from whom I expect to receive certain honors more than the approval of those from whom I do not expect to receive such honors.

I'm willing to sin rather than face the rejection of certain individuals. I miss number seven. I worry about what people think of me.

[4:53] Number nine, I struggle with being a respecter of persons and showing favoritism. Number ten, I believe that being rejected is one of the worst things that a person could possibly experience.

Number eleven, I avoid conflicts rather than trying to resolve them. Number twelve, I take unnecessary precautions to protect my good name. Thirteen, I become angry when I am contradicted by others, especially when being publicly contradicted.

Fourteen, when meeting new people, I spend more time thinking about how to impress them than how to minister to them. Fifteen, my fear of being rejected paralyzes me to the extent that it keeps me from getting close to others.

Sixteen, I forget that being rejected by others is part of suffering for righteousness' sake, that is my reasonable service to God and part of my calling as a Christian.

Seventeen, I long to be noticed more than I long to be godly. Eighteen, I give in to peer pressure rather than standing up for what I know is right.

[6:08] Nineteen, I do not witness to others as I should because I fear being criticized or rejected. And the last one, I overreact to criticism by dwelling on it too long or unnecessarily allowing it to depress me.

Well, you can total it up on your own. And I don't know if you can make it out. Not that it matters so much, but Priolo gives us a scale there, 96 to 100.

You're free, 90 to 95, probably free, 80 to 89. Too concerned, 70 to 79, people pleaser. And less than 70, you're a bona fide addict.

Just note that if you do all of them sometimes, on average, you're at 60. Jason pointed out to us last week that this shirt of people pleasing is the first shirt we put on in the morning and the last one we take off at night.

So after I put on my shirt this morning, I also put on a tie. It's the third time I've worn a tie to this church. It's also the third time I've taught Sunday school.

[7:25] So I don't know if that's a coincidence or not. But that's to talk about motives. What kind of motive might I have for wearing a tie? Well, maybe I was thinking, well, you know, what are people going to think of me if I stand up here and don't wear a tie?

Or maybe my wife said to me, you're wearing a tie if you're going to stand up there in front of all those people. Or maybe I thought, well, I'm teaching Sunday school this morning.

I need something to hook the mic on. I better wear a tie. Or maybe I said, Lord, you know, I never wear a tie to church, and I don't know whether to wear one today or not.

And then I went from there. So those are all kinds of different motives I could have had for wearing a tie. And motives are a key part of understanding ourselves and this issue of pleasing people and being an approval addict.

And so to try to get after motives, I broke up our activities into three possible buckets. One would be something that's always wrong. It's wrong no matter what. In this category falls things like the Ten Commandments.

[8:31] It's always wrong to covet. It's always wrong to kill and to steal and to lie and to have other gods and so on. Just use coveting, for example. If there is such a thing as another world, another universe somewhere created by God with people on it, it's wrong to covet there, too.

It's part of the nature of God. There's no way it could be right. That's one category. Another category might be it's always right. The other one, it's always wrong.

This one, it's always right. Some things are always right. It's always right to tell the truth. It's always right to honor your parents. It's always right to practice hospitality. It's always right to obey those in authority.

Or is it? Are you thinking maybe these aren't very good examples? I hope you are. It's always right to tell the truth. Well, the Bible says, speak the truth in love.

It doesn't say speak the truth at every single occurrence. And it doesn't say speak it when love isn't in your heart. So maybe it isn't always right to speak the truth. Maybe we need to look at our motives. Last week, Jason gave us the example where we're cleaning.

[9:41] Wouldn't be me, but let's say your spouse would clean the house furiously before you have guests for the purpose of impressing the visitor. Hypothetical situation.

It might happen in a household or two. On the way out last week, Lou said to me, you know, I thought that was a good Sunday school, but I disagreed with the one example about cleaning the house.

God is a God of order. He believes in cleanliness and order, and I don't agree with that. And I said to Lou, I agree with you, and I disagree with you.

Why? Because the motive is what's key here. I agree with him because God is a God of order. He does expect us to live orderly lives and to try to bring that about in our surroundings.

But I disagreed with him because God is looking at our heart. He's looking at our motives. And so if that work is being done in order to gain the approval of others, it's sin.

[10:40] Plain and simple. Let's use another example. Try money. Is it sin to use money? No. Is it sin to want money?

Not necessarily. Money is a necessary part of getting clothing and supporting missionaries and obtaining food and shelter and so on. It's part of our life.

However, to sort that out then, we have to ask ourselves, what is my view of money? Why do I want money? And then we get to motives. So here the Bible addresses us saying things like, Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin.

And destruction for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered from the faith. What about pleasure?

Is pleasure inherently wrong? Well, no. God created pleasure. Created us to take some pleasure out of work or hobbies or relationships. However, it does become a problem when we can be described as lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

[11:57] 2 Timothy 3. So we started that section by saying, Here's some things that are always right. And that turned into a section about things that are sometimes right depending on the motive.

So we've got always wrong. It depends on your motive. And then we've got always right. So I think in the always right category, it's a pretty small category because it's populated with things like, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and your neighbors yourselves.

In other words, the always right category is kind of pre-qualified with addressing our motives right up front. So it's right, which always includes a motive.

It's wrong, which sometimes includes motive. And it depends where right versus wrong depends solely on the motive. So today's chapter is entitled, Is it Ever Right to Please People?

And of course, that's going to turn on motive, and that's why we spent some time talking about motives. If it wasn't, let's see, if it's not always right to please people, then we wouldn't have this book.

[13:15] And so you can bet that it's not always right to please people. But it turns out it's not always wrong to please people either. Romans 15, 2, for example, we read, Let us each please his neighbor for his good to build him up.

So our author gives us six scriptural examples or categories where it is right to please people. And these are listed for you on the reverse here in the bottom section entitled, Six Situations Where It Is Proper to Please Others.

Our first, It is right to please people to the extent that doing so is not the leading principle of conduct or primary motive of your actions, but subordinate to the love of God and love of our neighbor.

What does that mean?

At some level, it's just permission to not be ornery and contrary. In other words, we don't need to make it our goal to not please people. On the quiz, the top score, if you will, is greater than 95.

[14:38] And Priolo says of those who score over 95, You may have a problem with being insensitive, callous, or even hard-hearted, but you're definitely not a people-pleaser.

Okay, you're not a people-pleaser, but you've got some other significant sin issues there as well. So the solution to being a people-pleaser is not figure out what people want and do the opposite.

So kind of at one level, that's what number one is saying here too. But there's more to it than that.

It's also a point about where pleasing people is on your priority list. Priolo is saying it's okay to please people and it's okay to want their approval.

The line is crossed when that desire for approval is no longer subordinate to the desire for God's approval. So in our priority scheme, we have to have love God above all. Below that is love your neighbor as yourself. And below that, maybe not number three, but still below that is seeking approval from others. So it's down here. And he's saying the problem is when this number three or less, gaining the approval of others, rises above seeking God's approval. [15:48] That's when it becomes sin. So it's not inherently sinful. Now, I had some trouble with this point at first, especially after last week's lesson. I mean, I walked out of there thinking, man, it's never right to please others, or it's never right to have that as a motive.

But this first point, I think, is a corrective for that. And what helped me was to begin to see that pleasing people and the concept of honor are not that far apart. And if we go through the Proverbs, we come across a lot of verses about honor and how that's a reward from God. And I'm going to cover those after I read this other quote to you from Priolo. So to desire the approval of others is not necessarily wrong. If it were, to praise or commend one's child would be to necessarily tempt him to sin. Our desire for praise is part of our makeup, which allows us to more readily sense the shame and reproach associated with our sin. To experience no desire for praise is to experience no sense of shame.

[16:59] There's a lot in that. I'm not going to take the time to develop that, but I hope that makes some sense to you. But back to the Proverbs then. I'm just going to read a few Proverbs here.

Proverbs 3.16, speaking of wisdom, Long life is in her right hand. In her left hand are riches and honor. Honor, in this case, is clearly a reward of wisdom.

If a reward isn't attractive, it just isn't a reward anymore. So there's nothing wrong with that being attractive to us.

We were created to have that honor be an attractive thing for us. And consider the alternative. I mean, who would advocate I'm seeking dishonor or disgrace?

That doesn't make any sense either. In fact, it's the fools that get disgrace. Proverbs 3.35, the wise will inherit honor, but fools get disgrace. Proverbs 8.18, riches and honor are with me.

[18:01] Wisdom speaking again. Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness. Proverbs 21, whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life, righteousness, and honor.

In 22.4, the reward for humility and the fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life. God himself is offering these rewards that he knows will be attractive to us.

God does not play off of our sinful nature. In other words, that's part of our created nature. That's something he's built into us. Next, let's consider our Lord touching on the same topic in Luke 14. You can turn there if you like. It's Luke 14. Jesus is at a prominent Pharisee's house, we read in verse 1.

And he's just healed a man on the Sabbath day in that house. And the Pharisees had nothing to say about that. Then in verse 7, we read, When he, Jesus, noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable.

[19:16] Don't you just love how free Jesus is? I mean, he's just at a meal. He's a guest at a prominent house. He just isn't worried about what his host is going to think about this upcoming parable.

He isn't worried about what he's going to think about him healing somebody in his house. Jesus is entirely free. Why? Because his purpose, his sole purpose was to please his father. And so there's freedom, too, when we can figure out who it is we ought to please.

In any case, going on with verse 8, When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited.

If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, Give this man your seat. Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place.

But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when the host comes, he will say to you, Friend, move up to a better place. Then you will be honored in the presence of your fellow guests.

[20:20] Jesus is giving instructions here how not to be humiliated at a dinner party. I conclude from that that avoiding humiliation is not sin. It's a wisdom issue.

I don't want to be a fool. I don't want to be humiliated. And Jesus gives instructions in how not to do that. He's also giving instructions in how to be honored in front of your fellow guests.

Back in verse 10, We do read in Proverbs 25 that it is not honorable to seek one's own honor. However, based on Jesus' teaching here and the various Proverbs on honor, I think it's safe to say that it is wise to act in ways that avoid disgrace and lead to honor. Bottom line, don't throw out the baby with the bathwater.

Just because we're talking about pleasing people doesn't mean that all people-pleasing is wrong. We have to be wise about this. We need to give consideration to when it's appropriate and when it's not. Honor is God's reward and is associated with wise living.

[21 : 38] Let's give it its proper status. Number two, It is right to please people to the extent that establishing a good name for the cause of Christ is your motive.

Proverbs 22.1 gives us the role and value of a good name. It says, A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.

I just have to read a lot of these quotes to you. It's so excellent. I can't pass them up here. Here's another one. Here, Priolo is quoting Hugh Blair, who says, The sphere, and this is speaking now about number two, when it's right to please people for the cause of enhancing our reputation under the purpose of a good reputation being useful to being able to have the credibility to spread the kingdom.

So Hugh Blair says, The sphere of our influence is contracted or enlarged in proportion to the degree in which we enjoy the good opinion of the public. Men listen with an unwilling ear to one whom they do not honor, while a respected character adds weight to a man's example and authority to his counsel.

To desire the esteem of others for the sake of its effects is not only allowable, but in many cases is our duty. And to be totally indifferent to praise or censure is so far from being a virtue that it is a real deficit in character.

[23 : 14] Here's a couple of scriptural examples where certain categories of people are advised to be concerned with their reputation.

In 1 Timothy 3, we read of overseers. He must be well thought of by outsiders so that he may not fall into disgrace. I think what's profitable for a church leader is profitable for the membership as well.

Widows in 1 Timothy 5. I would encourage younger widows to marry bare children and so on. And give the adversary no occasion for slander. In other words, Satan is going about as a roaring lion looking for our faults.

And especially those cases where we slander the gospel by the way we live in hypocrisy or weakness or failure. Particularly hypocrisy, I think, though. And he uses these things in his battle against God to slander the gospel.

And servants, in 1 Timothy 6.1, let all those who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.

[24 : 24] Think about your role in the workplace. Most of you can relate to that either currently or from not too distant past. If you're in the workplace, you might have a good attitude towards your boss for, and here we go with motive again, because you want to advance your career.

And you think, well, if I honor my boss, I'm respectful to him, I'm obedient, I do what he wants, he's going to think well of me, and bingo, I'm going to have a good career. Or, that, by the way, would be contrary to what we're talking about here.

So, or, we could say, I want to have a good reputation at work, because I want to be able to spread the gospel. When I come up to my co-workers, they're not going to think, there's that lazy slug, what's he got to say?

No, I want to have a good reputation with those around me, so that when I come to them, they'll at least give ear. Finally, notice that diligence is required in the maintenance of our reputation.

Ecclesiastes 10 tells us that dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench. So, a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

[25 : 33] Just a little bit of folly can ruin your hard-worked-for reputation for wisdom and honor. Number three, it is right to please people to the extent that the Bible commands you to please, honor, and obey your parents, your rulers, and your superiors.

Romans 13.1, Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except God, from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

The first category is parents. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. Proverbs 10.1, A wise son makes a glad father. Proverbs 15.1, Again, a wise son makes a glad father. So, is it right to please our parents? Yes. Is there a qualifier associated with that?

Yes. We always have to be looking at our motive. Our children can be seeking to please us for purposes of, maybe it's only my family, but for purposes of manipulation.

[26:45] Maybe they want something, and so they're extra nice or extra obedient or do an extra chore. That's sin. Their motive is wrong. God is looking at their heart. On the other hand, it is good and proper for them to honor us, to figure out what pleases us, or for us to tell them that, and to do that, for they are clearly commanded to honor their father and mother.

In my case, if I wanted to honor my dad, I would not buy him a set of golf clubs, or offer him a round of golf. He thinks of golf as grown men walking around on a lawn, putting a little white ball in a hole, and he thinks it's ridiculous.

No offense to you golfers, but anyway, that's just his view. So, if I want to honor him, I wouldn't do something like that for him. In other words, you've got to know the person that you want to honor. It takes a little bit of study to do that, and that's all appropriate under the heading of honoring, and honoring for the purpose of honoring the one who gives us the command.

Rulers. Be subject to the Lord for the Lord's sake, to every human institution.

1 Peter 2. Jesus said, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. So, is it right to please our rulers and government officials?

[28:08] Yes. Same qualifier. Employers, we've talked about some already. So, let's move on to number four. It's right to please people to the extent that the Bible allows you to please your spouse.

The central passage here is 1 Corinthians 7, where Paul says, I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord.

But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit.

But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. This division of interests, namely desire to please the Lord, with its competing desire to please our spouse, is not condemned in the Bible.

Indeed, we are commanded to have sacrificial love in Ephesians 5, 1 Peter 3, and others. And it's hard to see how you could love one another without knowing and doing at least some of the things that please the other.

[29:20] So we ask again, is it permissible to please one's spouse? Yes. Where do we cross that line?

Any brave souls want to give an example? We're disobeying God.

In other words, pleasing our spouse is ascended above the level of our desire to please God. Then we're venturing into sin. Here's an example. The inordinate fear of rejection also puts people pleasers in bondage to man by so paralyzing them that they are diverted from fulfilling certain biblical responsibilities.

I have counseled many women married to professing Christian husbands and church members. Yet these men were involved in various continual life-dominating sins. These wives chose to live with the sins and their consequences rather than to put biblical pressure on their husbands to repent. Why did they do this? They did it because they were fearful of their husbands' rejection. They preferred to cover up their husbands' sins rather than follow the mandates of Matthew 18 because fundamentally they were people pleasers.

[30:41] They were enslaved not only to their fear but to their husbands' as well. That's not to pick on wives, but I mean spouses, we could say generically, we have an obligation to one another to deal with sin in one another's lives.

And that can be a scary thing, puts certain things at risk, peace in the house and so on. But as Mickey pointed out, fundamentally where's our loyalty?

Is it first to God or is it first to my spouse or is it first to myself because of the benefits I get from my spouse? All lesser motives. Number five, is it right to please people to the extent it is right to please people to the extent that you are to become all things to all men whom you are attempting to save

for Christ?

The Apostle Paul is our example here in 1 Corinthians 9.23. Paul says, I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessing.

In verse 19, he says, Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible.

[31 : 55] Paul gave up his freedom for the sake of the gospel. In verse 20, he says, To the Jews I become like a Jew to win the Jews. Verse 21, To those not having the law I become like one not having the law, though I am not free from God's law.

And verse 22, To the weak I become weak. Here is the man who has had the most influence of any human being on the course of human thought on Christianity. And he was willing to veil his intellectual powers in order to be able to further the gospel with those who were not on the same level for him.

For Paul, the gospel was everything. It was his first priority, for he wanted to serve God. I am not going to address number six.

In the issue of time, it is quite similar to number five. And I just want to close by talking a little bit about the cure.

One cannot simply reform. It is not enough just to put on. We must also... It is not enough to just put off. We must also put on.

[33 : 04] In Matthew 12, we're warned in the parable Jesus gives of the man sweeping out his house, but leaving it empty. He didn't put on. And the evil spirit came back with seven more to occupy that clean and empty space.

Ephesians 4.22 says, We must not only put off the old self, we must also put on the new self. And of course, it's absolutely critical that we put on the right thing.

People are consumed by all sorts of things. But the thing that we were created for and that which we ought to put on is a concern for the glory of God so that something that is big, something that is all-consuming, something that we were created for and that we were made for, when we put that on and we become consumed with the things of the kingdom, with the glory of God, then we can have some confidence that pleasing of men will fall to a lower level.

In our lives. Anytime we're convicted by the need to change, to be something different, we're faced, I think, with the inadequacy of our own resources. And that's not a bad place to be.

Thankfully, we have a wise and powerful God who is able and willing to help us become more like His Son. It's been said that right thinking precedes right living.

[34 : 27] When God and His glory are big, life-shaping concerns in our lives, our thinking is bound to shift. I just want to close with a couple examples just so you can have some additional phrases, if you will, to moderate your thinking.

Here's what a people-pleaser says. I wonder what he'll think of me. A God-pleaser says, I wonder what his needs are. Or, I'd better not let him get too close to me versus maybe I can be a good influence on him.

I'll probably make a fool of myself versus if I make a fool of myself, so be it. I'm more concerned about meeting his needs than about what he thinks of me. What can I wear to the party that will not make me look fat?

To whom can I minister at this party? My pastor will be disappointed if he finds out I went to that movie. I will not go to any movie that will violate my conscience.

I've got to do my homework if I don't want to be embarrassed. I've got to do my homework if I want to be a faithful steward. I've got to read my Bible now because it's late and my parents expect me to read it every day.

[35 : 40] I'm going to try to read my Bible every day because it's so vital to my spiritual growth. And so on. So you can see some application there. And then very quickly, in the top part here, there's kind of a section called activities, party being pleased on the surface.

We've used the word pleasing people in a number of different ways and it can get confusing. So I want to give some examples that I hope will be a help to you. So the first one here is pleasing people, which is from the book title.

And the party being pleased on the surface is other people. The party really being pleased is me. So it's sin. So pleasing people, in the context of this book, is really pleasing myself.

I'm my own God. I've become an idol. Another example is to please your neighbor. Terminology from Romans 15. The party being pleased on the surface is your neighbor.

But it's being done in submission to God. It's being done in obedience to God. So that's the party really being pleased. And of course, that is not sin. And then the third one is to please your spouse or employer, parent, and so on.

[36:53] And that can go two different ways. You can please your spouse for your own benefit, which is sin, or could be sin. Or you can please your spouse for your spouse's benefit.

And that is not sin. The last one being guard or build up your reputation and credibility. The party being pleased on the surface is me in both cases.

If I'm really doing it for me, it's sin. If I'm doing it so that I can have a better reputation and further the gospel, then God is the one being pleased. And it is not sin.

A reminder, if you're interested in getting the book, please see me and I'll put that together and put out an order in the coming week.

And I hope you'll take the quiz home and grade it and we'll have some continuity from week to week in thinking about these things. Let's close in prayer. Father, we come to you inextricably linking ourselves, who we are, with wanting to please people.

[38:01] And we need your redeeming grace to change us and to reorient our focus into proper things like loving you above all and our neighbors, ourselves. I pray that you will use this material and this book to help us to see who we are, to see our need of Christ, and in faith to depend upon him for all the strength we need.

It's in his name we pray. Amen. Amen.