

The Dangers of Being a People Pleaser

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Preacher: David Wesner

[0:00] Priolo, who is the author of the book we are going through this morning, we are on to chapter 3, frequently uses the terms inordinate or excessive when referring to our desires.

! With the idea being that it is often acceptable to have a certain desire so long as it is held in moderation. However, when that desire becomes excessive, then it moves into the realm of sin. I'd like to try to add a little clarity around this concept before jumping into the topic for this morning, which is the dangers of being a people pleaser.

There is a desire for and an enjoyment of both God and His gifts that is good and right.

I've attempted to depict this in the top box on your sheet, titled, Amoral Desires. These gifts can be anything from the food we eat to the honor and praise He bestows.

[1:00] I've given some examples on your handout. I'm not going to read through these on the sheet. It's important to note that the desires themselves are neither righteous nor sinful.

Rather, it's our response to them that's the all-important question. Our possible responses I've depicted in the next two boxes, which are green on the one side and yellow on the other, either righteous responses to those amoral desires or sinful responses to those desires.

And the question that these boxes are trying to answer is, what makes a response okay or sinful?

And again, you can read through the two lists, but in a nutshell, separating God's gifts from the giver of those gifts becomes idolatry.

Put another way, seeking the gifts themselves apart from God becomes sinful. There's nothing wrong, for example, of desiring to be honored.

However, seeking honor onto itself apart from God is sinful. Allow me to illustrate. Last week, we considered the passage where Jesus taught us to take the low position rather than the high position, so that if the owner of the house comes along and sees me in the low position, he might elevate me to the high position and thus honor me in front of all.

[2:25] That would be a good thing that I would enjoy. The assumption of the passage is that apart from sinful flesh, there's within us an amoral desire to avoid humiliation and to gain honor.

And it's this desire to which Jesus is appealing. It's important to note that the punchline of the passage, however, is that we are to operate under an attitude of humility and that it is God who is the one who bestows the honor.

So when honor comes, we enjoy it as a good gift from his hand to an undeserving sinner. And such enjoyment is proper and right when done with an attitude of humility, thanksgiving, and praise to the giver of the gift.

God commands me to pray without ceasing, and it is the language of prayer that keeps God connected to his gifts in my heart. This is all to say that there can be proper enjoyment of in seeking after God's good gifts that's both right and expected.

We would rightly conclude that one who would seek to starve himself rather than use all of his rightful means to satisfy his hunger is warped in a need of some help. In the same way, seeking and enjoying honor does not need to be sinful in and of itself.

[3:34] I can seek to please people with the recognition that good can come back to me, and in so doing, I am not, again, sinning with that motive.

And this is the context of the balance that Priolo is attempting to make when he uses words such as inordinate and excessive desires.

So the burning question becomes, when does people-pleasing become wrong? And for that answer, I direct you to the bottom half of the page.

You might remember that there was a separation made between self-centered people-pleasing and God-centered people-pleasing from last week's lesson, in which this topic was discussed at length.

What is at the bottom of my motive? Was really what Priolo was asking. Is it for the other person's good, or is it for God's glory?

[4:41] Or is it for my own selfish gain? In other words, pleasing people for the purpose of pleasing and obeying God is righteous and proper. Pleasing people for selfish gain and to feed my own pride is sinful.

So how do I know if my motive is righteous or sinful? And this, again, goes into the realm of what we talked about last week. There's two warning bells that Priolo appeals to for knowing when we've crossed that line into sin.

The first, again, is wrong motive. When my motive is self-centered rather than God-centered, it's always sinful. I view motive as the early warning sign that tells us that sin is at the doorstep, or we've crossed over into that sin.

And I would think or see it as something that comes to the discerning heart. So I've put it next to number one here and said more sensitive conscience. But if you miss this sign, the second warning bell is inordinate or excessive desire.

Again, discerning my motive would be like that road sign that says, Bridge out ahead. And if I blow past that sign, I now come to inordinate or excessive desire.

[5:56] And I would liken that to the flashing red lights and the barricades at the end of the road. And if I blow past that one, I'm going to go over the cliff. Chances are, if it's not until you see the excessive desires in your heart that you become aware of your sin, you have long since entered into sinful motives due to our deceitful hard hearts.

So for the remainder of this lesson, with this very long, brief introduction, and continuing to the next lesson, we're going to be looking at several dangers of being a people pleaser.

But at this point, it's assumed that you are in the center yellow box of sinful responses to otherwise amoral desires.

In other words, again, we have our amoral desires. I've got wrong motives. I've got inordinate or excessive desires. And so now I'm in a position where I am responding sinfully to those desires God has put within me.

And if I'm doing so, what are some of the dangers of doing so that I will be experiencing? And so that then goes to the other side of your sheet, which is labeled one.

[7:18] It should have been labeled two. Dangers of being a people pleaser. First, people pleasing brings you into bondage by enslaving you to everyone whom you desire to please.

People pleasing brings you into bondage by enslaving you to everyone whom you desire to please. They promise them freedom while they themselves are slaves of depravity.

For a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. 2 Peter 2:19 Or in Romans 6:16-18 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey?

Whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.

You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. We must choose our allegiance. And very practically speaking, our allegiance is revealed by whomever it is that we live to please.

[8:30] When we are living to please God, we have chosen to subject ourselves to righteousness, according to Romans 6. When we live to please man, we have made ourselves the slaves of those whom we are seeking to please.

And this theme is found throughout God's word. James 4:4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?

Anyone who chooses to be a friend of this world becomes an enemy of God. In other words, that at every point that I choose to be a friend of the world, I am choosing to be an enemy of God.

Richard Baxter comments on this passage. They cannot serve two masters, God and the world. You know men will condemn you if you are true to God.

If, therefore, you must have the favor of men, you must take it alone without God's favor. A man pleaser cannot be true to God because he is a servant to the enemies of his service.

[9:28] The wind of a man's mouth will drive him about as the chaff, away from his duty and towards his sin. A man pleaser can be a servant to the enemy of God. A man pleaser can be a

servant to the enemy of God. People pleasers become slaves in at least two ways.

First, as it relates to decisions, and then secondly, as it relates to biblical responsibility. First, people pleasers become slaves to others in the decisions they make.

Their decisions are made on what others will think rather than on what God thinks. For example, in purchasing clothing, a young woman may make her decisions with her primary focus being what will bring her the most attention and approval, rather than what most conforms to biblical standards of modesty.

We could go on to evaluate motives behind decisions regarding the purchase of a vehicle. Why we buy the house we do, the way in which we spend our money. We must all buy or rent a place to live, purchase vehicles, and spend money.

But two different people earning exactly the same amount of money can choose to purchase the exact same car, but for one it could be right and proper and for the other excessively sinful.

[10:38] The difference comes down to the motive for which it is being done. The degree to which I am living to impress others is the degree to which I am living in bondage to their values and desires.

Not only do people pleasers become slaves to others in their decisions, they become slaves to others when they fail to meet their biblical responsibilities, which is the second sub-point. For example, how many times in church discipline do we avoid it for fear of man and the anticipated fallout that we might receive from certain individuals?

Last week, Carl read my quote from Piolo, in which he gave the example of Christian wives covering up their professing Christian husbands' sins.

But this example hit closer to home for me when I applied it to my children. How many times are my actions and responses as a parent unbiblical and cowardly because I fear losing the affection of my child?

What are the true motives behind why we don't confront our children as we often should? Could it again be that we're fearful of the fallout from those confrontations?

[11:53] In fact, we could substitute any relationship in this example. One of the greatest shortcomings of managers is their failure to perform needed confrontations with their employees.

Confrontation is not fun. It's like choosing to hit your thumb with a hammer, but I wonder how often our failure to do the hard right is because of a people-pleasing heart. Secondly, love of praise takes from you the honor you so eagerly seek.

Love of praise takes from you the honor you so eagerly seek. It's ironic. The greater our desire for honor and praise, the more in the end we will experience rejection and slander.

I want you to just stop and think of the proudest person you know or that you've ever known. Just take a moment and get an image in your mind. Who is the proudest person you have ever known? Do you have someone in mind? Now, how much respect do you have for that person? Not a whole lot, huh? Pride's at the root of all wrong desires to please people.

[13:10] Our desire for praise and honor of man is really just a symptom of pride. I want to be praised and honored because I have a high view of myself. One can be sure that the greater their desire for honor and praise, the prouder of a heart that they have.

And pride can only be concealed for so long. It eventually oozes out and when it does, it receives the repulsion that it deserves. The flip side of this irony is that those who are humble and are therefore not seeking for honor and praise will often be the recipients of it.

Consider Proverbs 25, 6, and 7. Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence and do not claim a place among great men. It is better for him to say to you, come up here than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman.

Again, paralleling Jesus' parable we looked at last week. I'd like to just pause here for a moment to make a point of application.

How does one conquer the bondage of people-pleasing? If people-pleasing flows out of pride, then the degree to which our pride is smitten will be the degree to which we will no longer be living for the approval of man.

[14:30] Is this not true? And we're not going to smite our pride until we hate it. One way to develop a hatred for pride is to consider the pride in others.

Priolo writes, When God brought an individual into my life whose pride was so obvious, I thought to myself, if my pride is half as obnoxious and repugnant as what I see in him, I repent from the depth

of my soul.

All of us abhor that pride in others which we cherish in ourselves. Well, God also hates pride. We read in several places in Scripture that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Is it not an act of wonderful grace that he's preserved within us, even in our fallen state, this same abhorrence to pride wherever we see it, at least when we see it in others?

So we need to take a hard look at the pride we see in others, not so that we can condemn them, but to consider its ugliness and to apply the spite we feel for it to the very same pride that is all too alive and well in our own selves.

[15 : 44] Thirdly, people-pleasing causes you to lose eternal rewards. People-pleasing causes you to lose eternal rewards. Please turn to Matthew 6.

Matthew 6. Beginning with verse 1. Matthew 6.1. Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men to be seen by them.

If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets to be honored by men.

I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your giving may be in secret.

Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.

[16 : 41] I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father who is on scene. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Jump down to verse 16. Verse 16. When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting.

I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father who is on scene.

And your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. When I do good works to please man, I'm really playing the part of the fool.

How so? Well, because I'm forfeiting eternal rewards for insignificant temporal gain. When I do something to be seen by men, God stamps it paid in full.

[17 : 51] Any heavenly reward that I may have received has been forfeited. So can we see why living to be a man pleaser is playing the part of a fool? Let's say an 18-year-old just won a national contest and for the reward he's been given an option.

He can either receive a check for \$50,000 today or he can choose to receive one penny doubled only once a year for 40 years.

Which would you choose? Well, if the 18-year-old chose the latter when he turned 58, he would receive a payout of \$5,497,558,138.88.

When we are being people pleasers, we're being far more short-sighted than a hypothetical person who just chose the 50 grand instead of waiting until he was 58 to become a billionaire.

For we're giving up eternal rewards to enjoy some paltry approval for a few moments or hours or days maybe by a few people in exchange for the pleasure and approval and reward from our Heavenly Father is truly an act of foolishness.

[19 : 12] Fourthly, desire for approval blinds you to your own sin. Turn back to Matthew 20, or I'm sorry, forward to Matthew 23. Matthew 23, verse 16.

Woe to you blind guides! You say, if anyone swears by the temple it means nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple he is bound by his oath.

You blind fools! Which is greater, the gold or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, if anyone swears by the altar it means nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift on it he is bound by his oath.

You blind men! Which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred. Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one dwelling in it.

And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it. Woe to you, teaches the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill, and cumin, but you have neglected the more important matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

[20 : 24] You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former. You blind guides. You strain out a gnat, but swallow a camel. Woe to you, teachers, the law, and Pharisees, you hypocrites.

You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisees. First clean the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside also. We'll be clean. Five times, Jesus calls the Pharisees blind. What is spiritual blindness? Spiritual blindness is to be spiritually ignorant, stupid, or slow of understanding, says Priolo. Jesus revealed some of these men's deceptive practices. They made oaths with little intention of keeping them, adding deceptive loopholes to their promises, being scrupulous about little details such as ceremonial washings or the finer points of tithing, but then neglecting justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Or looking great on the outside while on the inside being filled with filth and corruption. While they appeared to be righteous, inwardly, they were self-gratifying thieves. We may stand back and ask ourselves, how could they be so blind to their own sin?

[21 : 49] But a better question to ask would be what causes such blindness? Well, in a word, it's pride. Jesus made this abundantly clear in the first seven verses of the chapter.

Look at verse 5 of chapter 23 of Matthew. Everything they do is done for men to see. They make their philatropies wide and tassels on their garments long.

They love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues. They love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them rabbi.

Well, if pride is at the root of the desire for approval, I'd like to conclude this morning by pausing from our study and just considering how pride blinds ourselves to our own sin.

Five ways that pride blinds you to your own sin. First, pride tempts you to exaggerate your virtues.

[22 : 56] And this exaggeration comes in three forms. First, you overvalue the virtues that you do have.

Romans 12, 3 For by the grace given me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but think rather of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith that God has given you.

This passage leads into Paul's entire discussion on spiritual gifts. But before identifying some of the varying gifts that God distributes to men, Paul is careful to sound this warning.

He knows that pride makes us vulnerable to self-inflation. But on the flip side of pride, Paul doesn't propose that we have no virtues at all. Rather, he assumes that we do.

In fact, this entire passage is an exhortation to develop an understanding of your strengths and then to go about using them for God's kingdom and for his glory. Our problem, however, is that pride blinds us to believe that we're good at that for which we're awful.

[24 : 11] And it makes us think and take personal credit for that which is truly a gift from God and that we may be truly gifted in. Which leads to the second in a way in which pride tempts one to exaggerate his virtues and that is that you forget that everything you have is a gift from God, including those things within your very nature for which you can become so proud.

Paul states this fact very clearly in verse 6 of Romans 12. We have different gifts according to the grace given us.

God repeats this theme throughout his words. Just listen to a few passages and I have them listed on your sheet. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.

I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing. You may say to yourself, My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.

But remember the Lord your God for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth. For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

[25 : 30] What is it that you tend to boast in? Or to put it another way, in what areas do you find yourself looking down on another? Do you have wealth? Are you not poor?

Do you consider yourself above those of meager means? Who gave you the ability to produce wealth? Have you been given responsibility and authority?

Are you important in the world's eyes because of your position? Do you consider yourself better than those of lower position? Who put you in that position or gave you the personality and abilities to handle responsibility?

Are you outgoing and well-liked? Do others think highly of you and compliment you for your many virtues? Do you wonder what problem it is with those introverts around you and pity them for their lack of well-rounded personality?

Who gave you the personality you have? From whence does your confidence flow? Why do you wake up with a cheerful attitude or can quickly rebound when things go wrong?

[26 : 36] Are you easygoing and find that very little ruffles your feathers? Do you get frustrated with those that become overwhelmed easily and they can't take much pressure?

Who gave you the life perspective that you have? Who gave you the faith to see beyond the details of life? Do you take time to minister to people, do visitation, and help out wherever there's a practical need?

Do you get frustrated with those that have chosen a life of busyness and don't seem to ever have time to show love? Who chose the type of job or family life which affords you the opportunity and freedom to give of your time in this way?

Who gave you the personal skills, the time constraints, and even the convictions? We could go on and on. In asking these questions, please, I'm not advocating a position of no personal responsibility or that there are not consequences for the choices we make.

That's another whole lesson in and of itself. Obviously, we are responsible for the choices we make and we are to take what God has given us and choose to use that to serve others.

[27 : 50] The point is that we often look at ourselves, the world, and those around us through colored glasses and the color of those glasses is called pride. Pride makes our gifts, personality, convictions, and ways seem excessively right and everyone else's position inferior.

Priolo quotes Baxter on this point. Self-idolizing pride causes men to glory in their supposed greatness when the greatness of God should show them their contemptible vileness.

It causes them to magnify themselves when they ought to magnify their maker. It makes the strong man glory in his strength and the rich man in his wealth and the conqueror in his victories and princes and lords and rulers of the earth and their dominions and dignities and abilities to do harm or good to others.

To put it simply, thirdly, on your sub-point on your sheet, you make yourself the standard by which you judge everyone else.

You make yourself the standard by which you judge everyone else. Let us appreciate and thank God for the uniqueness of others while recognizing our own abilities as gifts from Him, seeking to be the very best we can be within the calling that He's given us for the purpose of honoring Him by serving others through the gifts, personality, and life calling which He has chosen for us.

[29 : 27] That's the well-balanced position. But not only is pride blinding by causing us to exaggerate our virtues, it also tempts us to minimize our flaws.

That's the second point. Pride tempts you to minimize your flaws. The blind man is so flattered by himself that any sin he does commit seems minor in his own eyes and is certainly overruled by all the good that flows from him.

Listen to Psalm 36, 2. For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin. How different was Paul's assessment of himself.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst. Since by definition pride minimizes the detection for our own sin, how can I know when pride is blinding me?

Well, we could list many things here. I have only listed two for lack of time. When I'm impatient and frustrated over another's sin. There is a difference between grieving over another's sin and wondering what their problem is.

[30 : 41] I'm speaking of the latter. When I'm wondering what their problem is I'm obviously out of touch with my own sin which means I'm blind to that sin.

I could use this as a wake-up call to quit looking at others and turn my eyes inwardly to the cesspool of wickedness that's within my own heart. I don't know how many times and I don't know why it happens on the way to work while I'm trying to pray but as I start praying for somebody all of these evil thoughts start going through my mind regarding them and I'm thankful the Lord many times stops me in my tracks and says what about you?

What about you? It's a wake-up call. I'm blind to my sin. Accept that. That's where we're at. Now how can we detect that we are living in that blindness?

A second way when I'm lacking in grief or the pain my sin is causing my God and Savior. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted. Well the flip side of exaggerating one's virtues is distorting one's flaws. Both are the work of pride.

[31 : 58] Pride tempts you to distort and magnify the seriousness of your flaws. Number three. Pride tempts you to distort and magnify the seriousness of your flaws.

In other words having a selfish desire to be perfect. Priolo writes perfectionist tendencies usually flow out of an inordinate desire to win the approval of others or fear of being rejected by them. How can I know that I am being blinded by this aspect of pride? Well extreme sensitivity. Inability to receive criticism let alone profit from it.

Unwillingness to perform services to others of any kind for fear of failure. After failing before others in some way having a desire to run away or never show my face again desiring to start over with a different group of people.

These are just all different ways in which pride distorts and magnifies the seriousness of the flaws. Then fourthly pride focuses your attention by changing the outer man more than the inner man.

[33 : 11] Pride focuses your attention on changing the outer man more than the inner man. Are we more concerned with outward appearance or inward character?

Paul wrote to Timothy train yourself to be godly for physical training is of some value but godliness has value for all things holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

When we clean the outside of the cup with no thought given to the heart from whence it flows we are living for the pleasure of man. man. But it is even possible to seek the reformation of one's character for prideful motives and I just say this as a point of caution.

I can seek to reform an angry spirit or ironically even a proud spirit out of a desire to win friends and influence people rather than for the purpose of pleasing God. I might have shared this before but I was amazed at the perspective I was presented in a book that I was required to read as part of leadership training within our company.

In it a humble spirit was elevated as the most important character to leadership. Amazing. And the attitude of thinking of one's own opinions as ultimate truth was exposed for its arrogance.

[34 : 36] The author of the book and the speaker on the accompanying CDs that I had seemed to be genuinely humble people but both were coming from a thoroughly humanistic and ultimately self-centered motivation.

Yes, it's possible to have a realistically humble view of one's place in the universe without having any desire for the glory of God. Only Christianity seeks change to the outward man through inward transformation.

faithfully and lastly, pride tempts you to change things in your life according to man's priorities rather than the agenda of the Holy Spirit.

What is it that drives me to want to change something in my life? Be it an aspect of my personality or a practice?

Is it the application of God's word in my life? Or is it the disapproval of man? Has anyone ever heard this reasoning before?

[35 : 41] But dad, everyone else is doing it. We find ourselves despising the politician whose decisions change with the shifting sands of the latest public opinion poll.

As if what everyone else is doing or thinking should be the guiding principle of one's decisions. But if we were to take a long, hard look into our own hearts, we would find little difference from the pure pressure-pleasing child or the poll-driven politician.

We are so easily swayed by the pressures and opinions of man and therefore must be ever on our guard against this blindness of pride. And perhaps the opinion we value the most is our own, so much so that we set it above the word of God when the two collide.

The Pharisees were again the classic example of this attitude. They held Christ in low esteem because they held themselves in such high esteem, writes Priolo. They didn't value the things he said because they placed too much value on their own opinions. What is your instinctive reaction when God's word cuts across a current belief or attitude or practice?

[36:54] Do you seek to justify it away? Do you go into argument of the mode? Or do you just try to ignore it? Or do you allow it to judge your heart and reform your ways and beliefs?

We can never accurately answer this question so long as our heart is in agreement with what we hear in God's word say. We must wait for the word of God to create conflict from my way and then see how we respond.

Let us pray that we would always respond with submission to God. Oh, that God would give us the spirit of Martin Luther on this point. Here I stand, I can do no other.

That we would stand not on man's opinion but on God's word. Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.

Secondly, that we would stand by God's grace. through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

[38:00] And third, that we would stand by God's power. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Therefore, put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground and after you have done everything to stand.

At Worms, Luther prayed, O God, do thou help me against all the wisdom of the world. May this likewise be our prayer. We're dismissed.
may be crossed