

But You Can Please God

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[0:00] Let me express my deepest apologies to the people in the front row! I was supposed to bring my wallet and hand out money so that you guys would like me.

! I guess I forgot. So we'll have to get directly to our lesson.

That's not a good start, is it Dave? As my esteemed colleague and cash-rich friend Dave Wessner said last week, today's lesson is the exact opposite of last week's lesson.

We saw last week that you can't please all the people, even some of the time, or some of the people, even some of the time. But this week we're going to see that you can please God most of the time.

We saw last week that pleasing people, and remember we're talking pleasing people in the bad sense, is a futile exercise. People have unreasonable expectations.

[1:05] They're too different. If you please one, you're going to indefinitely displease another. They're too judgmental. They're far too critical.

And we saw that Jesus, even though he was the perfect man, who loved everyone perfectly and completely, he was always fair. He could not please people.

People didn't love him. They weren't pleased with him. They saw no beauty in him. And finally, we saw last week that we can't please people because people, all people, have a God-sized hole in their heart.

And we can't fill that hole. Only God can. And so there's real no point in trying to please people, ultimately. And so we shouldn't try to please people.

We can't please people. But that's only one side of the story. Jesus said that a clean and empty house is just as bad as a demon-possessed house.

[2:07] Luke 11 says, when an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, I will return to the house I left. When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order.

Then it goes and takes seven other spirits, more wicked than itself. And they go in and live there. And the final condition of the man is worse than the first. That's teaching us a principle that empty is not good enough.

Not pleasing people is not good enough. Ephesians 4.22. Let's turn there in our Bibles. Ephesians 4.22. Paul teaches us this principle.

Just read a couple of verses here. Ephesians 4.22. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

If a people pleaser is to be healed, they not only have to put off the sin of pleasing people, but they have to put on the virtue of pleasing God.

[3:32] They have to please God in the place of pleasing people. If he doesn't put on the new self, if he doesn't replace pleasing people with pleasing God, then his condition will be worse than it was in the beginning.

Listen to Priolo. To eliminate the lust for man's approval, you'll have to replace it with a lust for God's approval. The best way to dethrone this approval idol is to prayerfully develop a desire for the approval of the one who righteously judges.

So, that's the main principle for today. And according to our author, that's why this chapter is the most important chapter in the book. And I'm not saying that. Our author is saying that.

In this chapter, we're going to see that it is really what is really possible. And that there's a really good alternative to pleasing people. And that's to please God.

It's the most important chapter because we get a vision to see of what is possible. We can see what is possible. And so we have motivation. Motivation.

[4:38] This is an important chapter to motivate us to strive after pleasing God. And if we don't see how good, really good it is to please God, then we're not going to have the zeal to pursue it.

And I love Christian biographies. I love Christian biographies because they show you what is possible. It's what is possible for a Christian to be by the grace of God.

And the present church is full of people like me. Mediocre. We're lukewarm so much of the time. But when I read a biography, I see what kind of sacrifice and perseverance and love and zeal that a Christian can have by the grace of God.

And when I see that sort of thing, it tells me to run after those things. And I'm motivated to run after those things. So when, let's say, I read a biography of Jim Elliott, I read that when he was in college, he wrote a note to his father and said this, My grades came through this week and were, as expected, lower than last semester.

However, I make no apologies and admit I'm letting them drag a bit for the study of the Bible, in which I seek the degree AUG. Does anyone know what AUG means?

[5:58] Not your common academic degree. Approved unto God. Jim Elliott got it right. He wanted God's approval more than good grades.

He wanted God's approval more than the approval of his dad or anyone else. And it was from that desire to be approved unto God that motivated him, that moved him to go to Ecuador.

God sent him to Ecuador. And then from Ecuador, God sent him home. And when Jim got there, Jesus met him and said, Well done, good and faithful servant.

And when I read that, I'm moved. I'm motivated by that. I see what's possible when we are trying to please God. So let's stop for a moment and imagine what your life would be like if you were to really get this.

If you're really to, by the power of the Spirit, dethrone this idol of people-pleasing. And you were to put on the virtue of pleasing God.

[7:03] Pinocchio was a puppet that wanted to be a boy. And some of us are a lot like that. We're not what we want to be.

We're not what we can be. There are strings attached to us. And those strings are people's desires. What people want. And people can pull us and move us.

And make us do things that we really don't want. The strings are the fear of man and the idol of people-pleasing. So let's imagine that those strings were cut and we were free from the fear of man. Could you witness like you really wanted to? Could you suffer like Christian martyrs have suffered in the past? Could you suffer gladly?

Imagine the freedom to serve God when there was no fear of man. There was none of that left. And that is really possible. Not completely possible in this life.

[8:07] But it is really possible. You can really please God. And that's what this chapter is about. You can make God smile. You can make God happy. And I'm not saying you can do it by yourself.

It's not without the Holy Spirit. It's not without Christ. But as we live in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can really please God. So we have seven points this morning.

Seven advantages to pleasing God rather than trying to please people. And the first is this. You only have one master to please rather than many.

You only have one master to please rather than many. In the book, Priolo gives an example. And I couldn't do any better than read it. So let me read it for you.

And you'll see what we're talking about. Years ago, I was the front-end manager of a large grocery store in a prominent chain of supermarkets in the New York City area. My duties included being responsible for the cashiers and shopping cart retrievers and for making sure that every item that left the store was rung up properly and paid for.

[9:18] It was one of the most exasperating jobs I ever had. I was only 20 years old at the time, and so I'm sure my youth and immaturity played a large part in my frustration. But the greatest external contribution to the problem was the fact that I had more than a dozen bosses.

Does that sound familiar to any of you? I had more than a dozen bosses. Not only was I accountable to and required to follow the directives of the store manager, but I was also accountable to the assistant manager, the department managers, grocery, dairy, produce, meat, and frozen foods, the district manager and his assistants, the district chief of security and his

assistant, and the family who owned the chain and who were really the top bosses. At any given time, I could and would get orders from any number of them. My frustration, as you can imagine, had to do with the fact that their instructions would sometimes conflict. So to please one, I would have to displease another. And in my mind, I had to sort out the pecking order so that I would always follow the instructions of the boss with the greatest authority. So how many bosses are you trying to please? If you're trying to please people in this room alone, you probably have 70, 80 bosses. And you have to figure out who you want to please.

[10:41] If you're a people pleaser, you're enslaved hundreds of times over. And it's sad. You're trying to do something that's impossible. Richard Braxter simply and wisely said, If you seek first to please God and are satisfied with that, you have but one to please instead of multitudes.

And get this next statement. And a multitude of masters are harder to please than one. Isn't that true? Isn't that simple? And why do we have such a hard time getting that? So you only have one master to please rather than many if you're pleasing God. The second advantage of pleasing God over people is this. God is wiser than man and will neither misunderstand you nor treat you unreasonably. So how many times have your words been misunderstood? Are your actions misconstrued? So what you really intended, they saw something totally different. A few weeks ago I was at work and someone kept on giving me the wrong parts. And so I had to go and deliver these parts to a person down the line, a girl that worked further away. And so twice my boss saw me doing this, delivering these parts to this person.

[12:00] And she decided that she needed to have a word with me for not working hard or something. And it stung. She didn't give me a chance to explain what was going on or why I was doing that.

She falsely accused me. And it really bothered me. You know what that's like? You're really bothered. You're falsely accused and you have no defense. Until I started asking myself, and I was standing there mulling it over, and I started asking myself, who am I really trying to please? Am I trying to please her? Or am I trying to please God? And what does that show? God knew what I was doing and why I was doing it. God didn't misunderstand my actions. He never does. He never sees things wrongly or incorrectly. He never falsely accuses. He never misconstrues our actions. God is loving and totally reasonable. And so Priolo asked, Why would you stoop to serve such an unjust master as a multitude of unreasonable men when you could serve the most understanding and reasonable master, the creator and the sustainer of the universe?

[13:12] So when you love the approval of man, it puts you in chains to unreasonable and cruel and foolish men.

But pleasing God sets you free. Sets you free. The third advantage is this. God judges not the outward appearance, but on that which is in your heart. God doesn't judge by outward appearance, but which is in your heart. Men cannot see the depths of your heart like God can. Remember what Samuel learned in 1 Samuel 15. He went to go anoint a king at the house of Jesse. And he saw this young strapping man come out and he thought, Ha ha, this must be the one. And the Lord spoke to him. But the Lord said to Samuel, Do not look at the appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For God sees not as man sees.

[14:17] For man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. Men can only see the outside. They can only see our actions. But God can actually see the motives and the thoughts that are driving our words and actions.

And that opens up a whole wider field for God to praise us and that we can please him. And it might seem like it's a bad thing, or it could be a bad thing that he can see our motives. He's both more severe and merciful than any master ever could be, any human master. Last week we saw that love puts the best interpretation on our actions. God is love. And he puts the best interpretations on our actions. And so, it's a good thing that the Lord looks into our heart. Listen to what one old pastor said. God is the only unerring judge of what is excellent. His approval alone is the substance of honor.

[15 : 25] All other praise is but the shadow of honor. But the sovereign of the world sees you in every light which you can be seen. From him you may receive the praise of good actions that you had no opportunity of performing.

For he sees them through your motives. He judges you by your intentions. He knows what you would have done if you but had the opportunity. You may be, in his eyes, a hero or a martyr without undergoing the labors of the one or the sufferings of the other.

His inspection, therefore, opens a much wider field for praise than what the world can offer you. So, have you ever wanted to give money to someone, but you simply couldn't?

You didn't have any to give? God sees that. He sees the intentions and the motives of our heart. Have you ever felt that martyr's desire in your heart where you would say, if I just had an opportunity to die for my Savior, I would?

God sees that. He judges us by that. And, of course, he sees into our hearts better than we can. And so what we think might be there might not really be there.

[16 : 38] But if it is, God sees us and judges us that way. So we can please God with just the movements and the motives of our heart.

Can you please man that way? No, you can't. They want to see actions, and they want to see them their way. And that's why it's better to please God than man.

The fourth advantage to pleasing God over man is this. God is no respecter of persons. God is no respecter of persons.

What does it mean to be a respecter of persons? Show favoritism. Right. People show favoritism all the time. And it seems that no matter where you go, no matter where you work or where you live or anything like that, the boss or the people in charge has their favorites.

Those people are funny. They're better looking. They have the same interest. There's a thousand things that make a favorite a favorite. They're powerful.

[17 : 46] They're influential. And so they receive preferential treatment. And God is not like that. God is not like that. And that's good for us. Because education, physical looks, the influence that we can exert in our society means nothing to God.

He looks at that, and it's nothing to Him. He only judges us by what we really are. He sees through all the bells and whistles. He sees through all the show.

And He does what is right. And He judges us according to what we really are. So you've seen that statue of justice. You've seen what she looks like. Her eyes are blindfolded.

And a lot of times, her hands are tied behind her back. No one receives special treatment. She doesn't see anything special about anyone.

And no one can bribe her. God is the personification of justice. And so, when someone comes before God, all the things is beauty and influence and power.

[18 : 52] He sees none of it. He has no favorites as far as justice is concerned. What happened when the person that He loved most came before Him covered in sin?

How did He treat that person? Well, He loved Jesus more than any. He was His favorite. And yet, when Jesus became sin for us, He suffered more than any man has ever suffered.

And it's not because Jesus is the Son of God that He gets to go to the highest place. It's because justice is always done in the kingdom of God. It's those who go the lowest that get to be raised to the highest.

And that's what justice is. And God is always just. He has no favorites. He judges us fairly. So your actions and your attempts to please Him will be evaluated and judged according to strict justice.

So why would you want to try to please men who can be bought off so easily? In politics, you hear about great sums of money that you can buy a politician with or a judge with.

[20 : 09] And people can be bought for a great price. But, you know, in this workaday world where people live normally, justice is usually bought off for a lot less.

People will sell justice for a smile. For a chuckle. For a laugh. Just to please other people. And so they give justice away. So why would you try to rather please people than God?

When God is so much better. So much better. God is no respecter of persons. The fifth advantage is that God is immutable.

What does immutable mean? It's a fancy word of the day. He doesn't change. Malachi 3.6 I am the Lord. I do not change.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And I don't think we appreciate that like we ought because we just haven't thought about it. Or at least I haven't.

[21:09] When was the last time that you tried to please God and God had changed his mind about what pleased him? When was the last time you looked in your Bible one day and it said, do this, and then the next day it said, do something totally different to please God?

It doesn't happen. One of the most common pieces of advice that all experts give to parents is be consistent. No matter what kind of expert they are, they all expect and want you to be consistent. You need to have clear, immutable boundaries if you're going to be a good parent. And the reason is, you can't one day expect something from your kids and the next day expect something totally different or you'll exasperate them.

You'll make them miserable. You can't just let them run and roughhouse around the house one day and then the next day expect them to be totally quiet like church mice. They'll be miserable.

They won't know what you want from them. They won't know how to please you. Have you ever wondered why so many people give that advice? Isn't it because parents like us, we change our minds and our moods change like the weather outside.

[22:23] One day, we're in a good mood. And so our kids can run and play and be as loud as they want and have as much fun as they want. And then the next day, we're in a bad mood.

And so we just want them to sit down and shut up and just get out of my hair. Well, why is that? Because we are fallen. We're sinful.

And we change our mind all the time. God never changes our mind or never changes his mind.

Even the people that we know best, like our spouse, they change their mind.

We know them better than anyone. And yet, we can't even please them all the time because they're changing. Priolo tells the story of when he was first married, in the first year of his marriage.

He and his wife went on a trip together. And they stopped to get gas. And she asked for a drink.

And so he marched in, intending to get her a drink that she would like.

[23:22] And he knew that her favorite drink was Diet Pepsi. She likes Diet Pepsi. And so he's looking through all the soda and everything. And he's looking for a Diet Pepsi.

He sees a Tab. And he remembers that she hates Tab. So he's looking high and low for this Diet Pepsi and finally finds one. And he goes out to the car, you know, brim full of confidence.

He's going to really make her happy. He knew. He remembered what she liked. So he hands her the Diet Pepsi. And she says, I really wanted a Tab.

And he said, but you hate Tab. Yeah, but I'm really starting to feel like I like Tab nowadays. That's how people are, aren't they?

You can't please them. So I'm sure you could tell similar stories where your spouse has changed his or her mind. So if we can't even please one person, we can't even please the one person that we know better than any other.

[24:31] How are we ever going to please all the people that are always changing? God is not like that. He's stable. He doesn't change. We know what pleased him yesterday.

We know what pleases him today. And we know what will please him tomorrow and forever. The sixth advantage is this.

God does not require you to harm yourself in order to please him, but is pleased only with the things that will ultimately lead to your own happiness.

God does not require you to harm yourself in order to please him, but is pleased only with those things that will ultimately lead to your own happiness. Before God opened our eyes to the glory of Christ, we were enslaved to all sorts of sinful desires.

We were more or less enslaved to people. And all those old masters, our sin, and this world, and Satan, they require us to harm ourselves in order to please them.

[25:44] They expect us to sacrifice our happiness and our safety for their pleasure. And that's a definition of a cruel taskmaster. How often in order to please people do you have to sin or do something immoral or dangerous to make them happy?

I mean, just listen to some of these requests. If you want to please me, go to bed with me. If you want to please me, then do whatever it takes to lose 20 pounds.

Or you'll get drunk with me. Or you'll get high with me. Or you'll lie for me. Or you'll help me steal this. Or you'll look the other way when I do this.

Or you'll just stay at home from church with me. There's a thousand things that people expect us to do, and they want us to do, that is immoral and dangerous if we are going to please them. And the wages of sin is death. That's what sin pays out. And so if we're going to please people, we're going to have to kill ourselves.

[26:54] We're going to have to die. There's no long-term happiness in pleasing people. But thank God that He freed us from people. He freed us from the bonds of slavery to people.

And so now we're only slaves to Christ. And it's in that slavery that we have freedom to serve other people and actually do them good. He alone can command us to please Him and not destroy us. If I were to have the authority over you and say, you have to do this, and you have to live this way, and you have to live this way to please me, I would destroy you. And everyone else would destroy you.

But Christ's commandments are the way of blessing. Luke 11 says, Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it. Christ's commands are the ways of blessing and happiness.

They're not commands to misery. They're not orders to misery. But they're invitations to eternal joy.

[28:03] When we obey Christ, our lives are not ruined. But for the first time, we find out what life really is all about. We find out what true freedom means and what pleasure and peace is really all about.

And it's in the slavery to Christ that we find that. And if that sounds foreign to you, if that just doesn't seem right, that how can slavery bring freedom?

And how can slavery to Christ bring pleasure and joy? Then you are still outside of Christ. You don't know Him. You're walking the wrong way.

And your heart is still enslaved to the wrong things. You think that slavery to this world and to sin is what will make you happy. But there is a way that seems right to a man.

But in the end, it leads only to death. And if you find no delight in obeying Christ, you find no delight in God's commands, then the thing to do is not to try to change your own heart or to try to make yourself better or suddenly put off those things.

[29:14] There's only one thing to do, and it's to come to Christ and beg for mercy. Only He's strong enough to subdue the strong man and become the new master in the house. All your life you've been sinning.

You're addicted to slavery to men. You're in love with that. And all your good deeds, everything that you could do, are filthy rags. If I was working on my car, and I cleaned up my hands with this rag, and it's all oily and dirty, and then I hear my wife call.

She says, Jason, I need you to come in here. And Phoebe had thrown up. And so I took my rag, and I cleaned up the vomit in my living room or something like that. And I sat down on the sofa, and I put my rag on the table.

What would my wife say when she saw that rag? I don't know what she'd say. I'm sure she'd say, get that rag out of here.

Right? And God's the same way. He doesn't want your filthy rags near Him. And so if you're enslaved to this world still, and you're trying to please men, your only hope is in Jesus Christ, and only in slavery to Him.

[30:28] He's lived a perfect life. And in Him, you have a perfect robe of righteousness that He will give you. So throw yourself on Him. And He is good, and you'll be counted righteous, and you'll be free from men.

Under His care, and under His control, you'll find out what true happiness is all about. That's the sixth advantage. The seventh advantage is this.

God is not influenced by tale-bearers, gossips, or false accusers. God is not influenced by tale-bearers, gossips, or false accusers.

I just read a story on Yahoo this week that said this. This is a quote. Gossip is more powerful than truth. A study showed on Monday suggesting people believe what they hear through the grapevine, even if they have evidence in the contrary.

Do you get that? They believe what they hear through the grapevine, even if they have evidence to the contrary. The researchers set up an experiment, and I didn't quite understand how it went, but there were these participants and these people that they were trying to give a certain amount of money to.

[31:48] And they had to decide how they wanted to share the money between these people. And the researchers would falsely put bad gossip in there.

They would say, this one is a Scrooge, or this one is really miserly with their money. And so the people handing out the money would give less money to those people, which is understandable, I guess, in a certain sense, that you don't want to give money to those people who you think are Scrooges.

But then the experimenters took it a step further. They actually showed what those people did with their money. And they showed that the people that they were saying who were Scrooges were actually the most generous people.

But they still said, oh, they're Scrooges, they're misers. They inserted contrary gossip, and the participants still responded to the gossip and ignored the facts.

And that's the world that we live in. People are drawn to gossip, and they would rather treat you according to misinformation than according to the truth.

[32:54] And the good thing is, is God is not like that. He's not like that. And that's why we need, and that's why it's good to seek to please Him.

Nothing misleads God. People are gullible. They'll fall for anything. They'll believe almost anything about you. If I were to spread a bad rumor about you, people will believe it, even if they have no evidence.

Isaiah says about Jesus, on the other hand, He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make a decision by what His ears hear.

But with righteousness, He will judge the poor and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth. What is that saying? He doesn't use His eyes or His ears in judgment.

Well, what does that mean? Well, our eyes can fool us. That's why we find magicians so intriguing, isn't it? They're doing something that's totally impossible according to our eyes.

[33:57] They're pulling rabbits out of their hats. They're cutting women in half. And our eyes are fooled. And so, in the same way, we see a person doing something, and we don't know why they're doing it because we can't tell their motives.

And our eyes may show us one thing, but in reality, what is going on is the total opposite. Jesus isn't like that. He doesn't even judge by what His eyes see or His ears hear.

He only judges by the truth. See, God's eyes and ears penetrate the facades. They penetrate the rumors.

They see the misinformation for what it is. And so, when we are trying to please God, there's nothing, there's no gossip. There's no misinformation. There's nothing like that that can stain God's opinion of us.

It's a bad thing if you're a hypocrite, isn't it? Because He sees you for what you are. But if you're truly trying to please God, there's nothing that's going to confuse the matter.

[35:08] There's nothing bad out there that's going to trick God. So the sum of the matter is this. You can please God, but you really can't please people.

God isn't confused by lies or gossip. He judges you fairly and not according to some superficial characteristics. So you can be the ugliest, the poorest, the most unintellectual person in the world, and you can please God when you can't please anyone else.

He is generous and kind with His judgment. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He knows how we are formed.

He remembers that we are dust. So I want to ask you, why would you try to keep pleasing people who are so unfair and so unkind and so unjust when God is calling us to please Him?

And in comparison to men, He's easy to please. We can actually please Him. When we seek to please Him, we find peace and joy and happiness.

[36:24] And when we seek to please people, we find misery and sadness and confusion. It's like we're running fast. We're like hamsters on the hamster wheel. We're running as fast as we can.

And with people, we're not getting anywhere. Are you making any more people happy today than you were ten years ago? But God gives us true freedom and real rewards for pleasing Him.

And at His right hand is eternal life and pleasures forevermore. See, God is no Scrooge. He's actually going to reward the people that please Him with life and happiness.

And so let's serve Him with all of our hearts. And that's what God is calling us to. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank You for the Lord Jesus.

And we admit from the very beginning that without Him we could not please You. And all of our efforts are dependent upon Him. And if He does not make us righteous in Your sight, then we will not please You no matter how hard we try, no matter how good You are.

[37 : 41] For we are sinners. We do not have clean hands or a clean heart that we could come before You and expect You to accept us.

But Father, thank You that just at the right time You reconciled us. You sent a Savior to die for us and in our place. And in our place receive the punishment that we deserved.

So Father, we pray that You would help us that in Christ that we might please You. And I pray, Father, for the Holy Spirit. Will You help each one of us here.

Will You convict us of sin. Convict us when we are still trying to bow down to the idol of pleasing people. We pray that You would give us new hearts, renewed hearts that would seek to please You. Thank You for Your great love for us. Thank You that You, like a Father, have compassion on those who fear You. And Father, we pray that You would have compassion on us today.

[38 : 44] Will You give us strength to worship You in the coming hour. Will You give us grace to speak to one another and so honor You and so encourage each other.

that we would be made more like Jesus Christ. Father, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.