

It is Impossible to Please People

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[0 : 00] Well, I'm going to take the next two weeks in this Sunday school class. And just as Pastor John had two lessons that kind of go together, I'm having two lessons that go together.

I'm taking my two lessons from Lou Priolo's book, *Pleasing People, How Not to Be an Approval Junkie*. I know that we taught this book maybe 10, 11, 12 years ago. I don't remember. I know that I taught some of it.

But today we're going to, or in these coming two weeks, we're going to take two lessons that go back to back that are complementary. And today we're going to talk about just how hard it is, how really impossible it is to please people.

And that's one reason we shouldn't bother with it, bother with living with it, living for it. Next week we're going to look at this reality, but we can please God.

You can't please all the people all the time. You can't even please some of the people some of the time. But you can please God.

[1 : 06] Now, I won't ask you if you have a people-pleasing problem. Most of us have some sort of it. Most people do.

Now, for sure, maybe some of you don't at all, but it's something that we generally struggle with. It's not a teenager problem.

We think of it that way, but it's not just in that area. It's not a new problem. It's not a modern problem. Way back in Proverbs, Proverbs 29, 25, the fear of man brings a snare.

There was Solomon several thousand years ago saying this is a problem that people have and it's a danger. So the fear of man, especially in the context of Proverbs, you can see it's opposite.

What would the fear of man's opposite be? The fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom. So the fear of man, it's a two-sided coin. On one side, we desire their approval.

[2 : 13] Isn't that true? We want them to approve of us. And on the other side is this fear of rejection. It goes right along with it. I don't want them to reject me.

Now, we want people to approve us, accept us, say that we're good, agree with us.

We want their good opinion. We want their good judgment. And we're afraid of their rejection of us. We don't want them to say that they're no good at whatever.

We don't want them to have a problem with us. We don't want them to disagree with us. We don't want to be on the outs with people.

And we hate it when we are. So on one hand, we want their acceptance, their justification, their declaration that, yeah, we're good, right people.

[3 : 17] We're doing what's right. And we're desperately afraid that they'll say that we're not right. So I hope you can see just right as I put it in those terms what a gospel issue this is.

What is at the very heart of the gospel? Except it's justification. Justification. It's how can sinners be declared righteous before God or by God?

How can we be declared righteous? Now, justification, this acceptance of our person comes from God. But what happens is idols step in.

Men step in. And idols say that they can justify us. They can make us good. They can make us right. They can tell us we're good people. And so if you have the idol of men, what you are looking for is for men to give you what only God can give you.

Or what only God should give you. And so we live for the idol's approval rather than God's approval. We fear men more than God. We seek their approval rather than his.

[4 : 29] And so here we are. This is a gospel issue. This fear of man. Fearing men. Living for their acceptance. In one way, in one sense, is a denial of the gospel.

It's not living on what we already have in Jesus, which is God's approval. So we're going to talk about different ways of getting out of the sphere of man.

But I want to begin with this one. That when we live in our justification before God, when we're living in the knowledge that I am right with God. God accepts me.

God loves me. God is welcoming me. When we satisfy our hearts with what we have in God, in Jesus Christ. Then we don't need the idol.

We don't need man's approval. Because I already have what they're promising. That's how Paul thinks about this whole issue.

[5 : 33] So turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 4. 1 Corinthians chapter 4. And what I want you to see is Paul's freedom in this chapter.

Freedom from this fear of man. And he is not worried about what they think of him. Or how they approve of him or not approve of him. I want you to, as I read this, I want you to feel his freedom. His nonchalance. His I don't care attitude. Is it sometimes good to have a I don't care attitude? I think it is.

That's what we see here in Paul. Something that I want. And so we want to look at how Paul got it. And it's something that you should want. So this is what he says.

In verse 3. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court. Now who is he talking to?

[6 : 39] He's talking to his people. His church. These are people under his care. And he says, I don't care if I'm judged by you. My conscience is clear.

But that doesn't make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, judge nothing before the appointed time. Wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness.

And will expose the motives of men's hearts. And at that time, each will receive his praise from God. Now, why doesn't he care? Why doesn't he care about their approval?

Their judgment? Well, because their opinion doesn't matter. I'm going to say that again. Their opinion doesn't matter.

The Lord is the judge. You don't worry about the people in the audience in the courtroom. You care about the jury. You care about the judge.

[7 : 38] Their opinion matters. The Lord is the judge. Jesus Christ is the judge. But we could ask Paul, how can you get confidence from that? But you're going to leave this all in the Lord's hands?

And Paul says, yeah. I'm not concerned about those people. I'm going to just leave this totally in Jesus' hands. I'm going to live for his approval. How can you feel confident in that?

How can you feel safe in that? And the answer is the gospel. Paul already knows that in a certain way, the verdict on who he is and on who he is in Jesus has already come down.

And the verdict is, God has said, this one is righteous. I accept him. So we are justified. We are accepted. God has put his seal of approval on his people.

And so now Paul is saying, I work for him. I live for his praise. I live for his reward. My judgment is not going to be between condemnation and innocence because there's now no condemnation.

[8 : 49] My judgment is one of reward. One of what is God going to do for me? How is God going to help me or praise me?

That's what he says at the very end in verse five. At that time, each will receive his praise from God. God is going to be praising people. Paul is saying, I'm that's what I'm living for.

Now. That's how Paul had his freedom from his from people. And he had great energy to work because this whole matter of whether he's accepted or not has been taken care of.

And he doesn't need man's approval. He has God's already. He doesn't. He doesn't need to live for their opinion because he has God's good opinion already.

Now, that's one way that we are set free from the fear of man. It comes when we see how we just don't need it.

[9 : 49] Can I give you something that will help you to think about when you're wrestling with any idol? When you say this is an idol in my life.

How do I free myself from this? And one way that you do that is by realizing that you don't need it. Whatever it is promising you, whatever it's saying it can give you, you probably already.

You certainly have it in Jesus already. So I don't need. Think about, you know. I don't need an idol to meet my need for rain.

Right. In the Old Testament, they had these idols for rain and for prosperity and stuff. And the realization that I don't need those idols because I already have a God who's in charge of the rain.

I have a father who gives rain. I don't need an idol to protect me from my enemies because I have the angel of the Lord encamped around me. So the idols promises. I don't need it.

[10:54] I don't need what they're offering. So the gospel sets me free by taking away the very need that I have by satisfying it, by fulfilling it. So I don't need man's approval because I have God's approval and I don't need what you're offering.

You know, so kids in the inner city, why do they join gangs? They don't join gangs because they want to do crime better.

They don't join gangs, you know, because I don't know what other reason they could have. They don't. They join gangs because that's a family for them. That's a place where they belong.

But kids who have a family, kids who already have a father figure loving them, a father loving them, it says, I don't need what you're offering.

There's no temptation for kids from stable homes to join gangs. That's how this is working. I don't need your approval if I have God's approval.

[12:02] So. How does God set us free? That's one way. By showing us that we don't need it.

There's another way. And this is just a common sense way. And it's it's pointless to try for the approval of men. It's it's pointless.

Remember on the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said about worrying. So you're there in your mind and the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is talking about worry. And he says, why worry about your life or what you'll eat or drink or what you'll wear?

That question. And he says, don't worry about those things. Why? What's the do you know the first thing that he says? Because.

You have a father in heaven who knows you need these things. You don't need to worry about him because someone else is worrying about them. What?

[13:03] Why worry? Because your father knows you need it. You already. It's already yours. But he also says. Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Now, what is he saying there? What's his point? Anyone?

It's meaningless. What do you mean? Okay. What else? That's good. What? Change that path.

Okay. That's. We're getting really close. That's. Worry produces nothing. Thank you. Worry doesn't do anything. Worry doesn't add a single hour to your life.

It doesn't change your hair from black to gray or gray to black. It doesn't do anything. Worry is a completely pointless, unproductive, useless thing to do.

[14:05] It's pointless. And so don't. Jesus is saying. Don't waste your time worrying. You're just beating your head up against the wall. Accomplishing nothing. So next time you are worrying.

I think Jesus is saying. Let's bring some common sense into this. Is that doing you any good? Is that changing the situation? Is that helping? No. It's pointless.

Now, that's what I want to spend the rest of our time on talking about this morning. We're talking about pleasing people. And what I want to say is it is pointless to try to please everybody.

It's pointless to live for the pleasure and the approval of people. It's a useless, impossible thing to do.

To try to make everybody happy. To try to even make most people happy. So right now, I'm probably not making someone here happy.

[15:09] I don't know. Someone probably wishes I would say something. Or probably saying I shouldn't say something. That's the way it is. I should include something or not include something.

Maybe someone is saying I shouldn't have even brought up this whole topic. Shouldn't we talk about something else? No. What I'm saying is it's pointless to try to live to make everyone happy.

You can't do it. And the Bible says, so you shouldn't bother. Now, there is a way that it is right to try to please people. When you're trying to advance the gospel for the gospel's sake.

Paul says, I live to please every man. But that's different than going around being afraid of everyone's opinion of you. You've heard that saying.

You can please some of the people all of the time. You can please all of the people some of the time. But you can't please all of the people all of the time.

[16:16] You've heard that expression. And that is such an optimistic and unrealistic and untrue.

It's more like this. You can please some of the people some of the time. But you can't please all of the people all of the time. You can't please some of the people all of the time.

And you can please all of the people none of the time. But you can please God most of the time. Okay? Why is it so hard to please people?

Why is that an impossible thing? And so why shouldn't we bother with living in the sphere of men? I'm going to give you three reasons.

And the first is people are different. Number one, people are different. With different tastes. Different preferences. Different ideas. And when you please some, you're invariably going to displease others.

[17 : 22] When you please some, you're going to displease others. So, let's pretend. I didn't know my wife was going to be interpreting today.

Let's pretend. You invite my wife and I over. And you're going to take us out to lunch. Or dinner. And you say, there's this new Indian restaurant I want to try.

My wife is going to be thrilled. She loves Indian food. She loves curry and all the rest. Me, not so much. Me, not really at all.

I don't want to go. You're going to make her happy. You're not going to make me happy. My wife's going to think that you have great taste and great ideas.

She's going to think, wow, you're sophisticated and all the rest. Me, I'm not going to think that about you. What makes you to differ?

[18 : 20] What makes us? Well, God makes us different, doesn't he? There are such inherent differences wrapped even in this building, let alone everywhere else.

There are inherent differences of tastes. There are differences in interests. There are differences in intellect. There's differences in ideas.

There's differences in gifts. There's differences in abilities. There's differences in, did I say everything? Preferences. You cannot make people, everyone happy.

In doing that, you're going to displease someone in nearly everything you do. So, people have different senses of humor.

Different ideas about what is right and wrong. The Bible shows us that. Even Christians thinking, you know what, that's right. And other Christians thinking, that is wrong.

[19 : 24] They're in the same church. They have different ideas. They strongly hold these differences of opinion. So, maybe some of you think, you know what, we need to sing more from the overhead.

Maybe some of you think, you know what, we need to stick with the Trinity hymnal. Maybe some of you think, we should have a guitar and drums. And maybe some of you are thinking, no way over my dead body.

Right? Others are saying, no way. Others are saying, let's do it. Some people, well, some people like certain kinds of sermons.

Others like other kinds. So, should I be slow and solemn when I preach? Some men are. That's their natural way. Or should I be light and conversational most of the time?

Maybe I should quote more scripture than I do. Maybe less. Someone would say, if I do it a lot, that I just proof text.

[20 : 30] And others would say, I'm not being serious enough about grounding my argument in the Bible if I don't do it. If I use the word sin too much, someone will say, I'm a downer.

A legalist. I don't have enough grace in my preaching. I need more gospel. But if I don't talk about sin too much, or if I don't talk about sin as much as they want, people will say, I'm just a compromising, modern, worldly preacher.

Well, where's the line? Who should I try to please? Should I be funny or should I be serious? Someone will say, I need more reverence.

Others will say, I need to lighten up. Who should I please? To please one is to displease another. It's not just in preaching, and it's not just in church things.

This is all of life. This is where you work. This is your family. This is the people that you live with. This is your, this is our life.

[21 : 41] People are different. People come with different conclusions, different experiences, different convictions, different tastes. And it's everybody. Everyone.

So to please one of you is invariably going to displease another. So it's a pointless activity to try to make everyone happy, to live for that.

Lou Priolo says, the only thing that seems to please most of the people, most of the time, is true Christian character. So do you want to please most of the people most of the time?

Well, then you have a true Christian character. But even genuine Christ-like character is misunderstood, and people don't like it.

So, it's futile to try. It's a pointless thing. Number two, on top of creation and natural differences, we have to deal with the reality of sin.

[22 : 52] Sin has thrown a wrench into all of this. If we were perfect, all those natural differences we could handle and live with.

But people are sinful. And people have fallen expectations. And fallen understandings. And fallen thoughts. And fallen opinions. When I was in college, one of the things that we like to talk about and try to understand was what theologians call the noetic effects of sin.

The noetic, which just means it has to do with thinking in your mind. It comes from the Greek word for your mind. So, someone might say the psychological, how you think, effects of sin.

And that's an important thing to think about. Because those people that we are trying to please, if we're living for their pleasure, those people are fallen.

They are unfair. They are selfish. They are ignorant. And they are hardened. And just to be clear, we're talking about me.

[24 : 13] And we're talking about you. It's not just them. It's you. It's me. Turn over to Ephesians chapter 4. Several pages over.

Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 17. And here we see the noetic effects of sin. How sin has affected the way people think.

And so, we're talking about how they think about you. How they think about what you've done. What you're doing. Verse 17. So, I tell you this.

And insist on it in the Lord. That you must no longer live as the Gentiles do. So, how do the Gentiles live? In the futility of their thinking.

They are darkened in their understanding. And separated from the life of God. Because of the ignorance. That is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

[25 : 21] Do you see some of the words that describe men in sin? And how they think. They're futile.

They live for pointless things. They think about totally useless, pointless things.

They're darkened. If you see. If you're in the dark. Can you see very well? No. Two weeks ago.

I got up in the middle of the night for something. And there was a storage tote at the foot of our bed for something. I didn't see it. I tripped and fell over it.

I think I broke my toe. I don't know. It makes this clicking sound every now and then. It's not supposed to. I know. Like I have this bruising. The point is. Is I couldn't see where I was going.

[26 : 23] And I fell. And I hurt myself. That's how men's minds are. Because of sin. They can't see. And you know who they can't see?

They can't see you. They don't understand why you're doing what you're doing. They don't understand God. They're separated from the life of God. They're ignorant.

They don't know. And besides that, they're hardened. That means they are opposed and have a bias against God.

But then along with that comes a bias towards people. I mean, that's what Paul says in Titus. You know, that's what we were.

We were like we had a bad relationship with God. And we went around hating and being hated.

That's what it is to live in a sinful fallen world with sinful fallen people.

[27 : 23] They are going to have a bias against you. A dislike. A hardening against you. So these people that I'm trying to please are not perfect, nice, sweet, fair, generous, honest, open, good-spirited people.

They don't see clearly. They don't understand clearly. They are confused but think they see. So they feel free to have a strong opinion because they think they see.

They're ignorant about things but they think they're wise. They are hard but think they are very reasonable. And so can you even please them?

Well, not most of the time. They'll treat you with great selfishness. Luperiola says this. Among all the other parts of our human nature, our abilities to think correctly have been distorted.

Sin has affected man's entire thought process, his perceptions, his reasoning ability, his judgments, his motives, his appetites, his desires, and his expectations.

[28 : 45] Then he asks this question. Then he asks this question. Why then would you trust his ability to discern your character and determine the basis on which he approves or disapproves of you?

Why trust him to determine the standard by which he accepts or rejects you? I have found that really long sentence to be very helpful in my own wrestling with this problem, with this sin.

I don't have to trust people's judgment of me. They could be wrong.

I don't have to agree with people's opinion. Because they could be wrong. Now, I might be wrong. And that's why I need to listen.

That's why I don't just take what they're saying and automatically rule it out. I, indeed, I could be wrong. And I need to be humble and listen to them. But I don't have to bend over backward to disagree, to agree with them.

[29 : 59] And if they don't think what I think, it doesn't mean I have to feel bad.

Why should I take their judgment so seriously? They're sinful. They're ignorant. We all are. And I know I have been ignorant.

And I have misunderstood. And I have prejudged people. I've done that to people. And they've done that to me.

Well, is that a death sentence? Does that mean your world's coming to an end, that they don't agree with you? No. They aren't the judge.

The Lord is the judge. And so it's like if some first graders sat me down and gave me a test. They decided what's important for me to do and what my life should look like.

[31 : 03] Would I care what those first graders thought of me? Would I care about passing their test? No. They're not credible judges. They're not credible teachers. And so Paul in 1 Corinthians is saying no man, no man is a credible judge of someone's character perfectly.

So he says I care very little if I'm judged by you or by any human court. I'm living for God's judgment. I'm living for God's approval. I'm waiting for him. You know, criminals aren't judges that you have to care about.

Richard Baxter wrote this. Remember that men are selfish. That their expectations will be greater than you will be able to satisfy.

They will not consider those things that might prevent you from giving them what they desire. Such as your ministry to others. Or your job. Or your necessary diversionary activities.

They want you all to themselves. As if you had no one else to care for but them. How many have been upset with me because God and conscience commanded me to spend my time on greater and more important things.

[32 : 21] So we shouldn't. Why shouldn't we live for pleasing people? Why is it so hard to please everybody and therefore we shouldn't live for it? Well, we're all different.

To please one is to displease another. So instead of that, we should work on pleasing God. And then secondly, men are selfish and unfair and ignorant.

Even Christians are still that way sometimes. Paul in Ephesians 4 is saying, I insist that you don't live like this anymore.

Now that means that, you know what? There's this temptation and there's this degree that we are still living like that. So, even Christians.

Judgment and criticism. Luperiola says, Even among Christians, judgmental and critical attitudes are all too prevalent.

[33 : 24] So, we need to put that in. We need to think of those two thoughts. Everyone is different. And you know what?

People are sinful. And number three, and this is of great comfort, and this is where we're going to end. Even Jesus didn't make everybody happy. He was the perfect man.

He went around doing good. You could say, can any of you point out a sin that I've committed? But he upset his disciples.

He upset his family. He upset the Pharisees. He upset the Sadducees. He upset Pilate. He upset Herod. He upset the crowd.

He worked miracles and healed the sick, and they wanted to kill him. He said, you've seen many miracles. For which one are you going to kill me? Which miracle have I done that you think

deserves the death penalty?

[34 : 28] The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, He's a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Here I am trying to save people, and you're calling me a drunkard and a sinner.

If I speak the truth, why do you not believe me? He who is of God hears the words of God. For this reason, you do not hear them because you are not of God. They didn't like that.

But he didn't lie. He just told the truth. And you know what their response was to his truth-telling? The Jews answered him and said to him, Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?

You don't like, you disagree with what we're doing, so isn't it clear that you're demon-possessed? Now, I've been criticized for things that I've said, but no one has ever thought to say, You know what? I think he's demon-possessed.

And really mean it. I hope. Now, the point here is, Jesus couldn't make people happy. He couldn't please most of the people, even some of the time.

[35 : 38] But did he live for that? Did he care? No, he didn't care. The one who sent me is with me.

He has not left me alone. For I always do what pleases him. I always do what pleases him.

Jesus, the perfect son of God, couldn't manage to please most people. And so he didn't worry about it.

He just said, I'm going to worry about pleasing my Father in heaven. I'm just going to do what he wants me to do. So, let's wrap this up. God in the gospel has set us free from the slavery of men's judgment.

How? By justifying us. By judging us himself. Judging us and declaring us righteous in Christ Jesus. And so we, right now, Christian, have the approval and the acceptance of God.

[36 : 48] We don't need man's approval. We have God's smile. We don't need man's smile. Then secondly, trying for it is pointless. We're too different.

To please one is to displease another. We're sinful. So why grovel in the face of people that are going to be unfair and selfish and ignorant?

Even Jesus couldn't do it. So he didn't bother with it. Now next week, we're going to see the wonderful good news that we can please God.

God is not like people. He's not impossible to please. His standards aren't always changing. We can please God. And in his word, he's told us lots and lots of ways that just living our life, we can please the Lord.

That's what we're going to see next week. We're dismissed.