

Approval in Christ frees us to live in light of the gospel for the pleasure of God.

Galatians 1:10 “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (ESV)

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I came ready for the Reservoir Youth Second Sunday lunch. I wanted to talk about TikTok... but as I made mention of some videos the resounding response was “we don’t waste our time with it!”

So a reference to social media may fall on deaf ears in this group! But As I was reflecting on Paul’s clear statement that he doesn’t live for the approval of man, a recent change to Instagram came to mind. Maybe you have taken advantage of it.

You can now, in the app, hide like and views. You can be kept from seeing how popular your posts, and those of others, really are. In announcing the new feature executives at Instagram said that “The aim is to “depressurize people’s experience” on the platform.” They recognized the social pressure to perform and the resulting damage to mental health.

More than just a dopamine hit in your brain, achieving approval of others is shaping the overall health of users.

It says something significant about our fragile hearts and the need for approval. Some of us are blessed with not giving a rip about how many likes you get on social media - but still we look for validation or approval in other interactions and the hunger for it shapes how we relate to friends and family, how we work, how we shape our public persona.

We come to the rebuke of an accusation against Paul and his gospel - that he is merely a people-pleaser.

And while it will take more verses to uncover the source of the gospel and Paul's proof that he hasn't served or been influenced by others - marking the difference in pleasing man and pleasing God is helpful in our Christian walk. So that will be our focus this morning.

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"Paul touches on something very profound for fallen humans when he speaks of "seeking the approval of man" (1:10). This need for approval is deeply wired into us. Yet the gospel has the power to calm the quest for human approval, for in the gospel we are freely given the full and free approval of God in Jesus. We are accepted and approved."

The situation in the Galatian churches was troubling. After having been planted by Paul and his apostolic band years before, some teachers had been making the circuit burdening believers. They came from Jerusalem and what was lovingly called the "circumcision party." Their claim was that, yes Jesus was the Messiah, but to be true Christians, Gentile believers (those from non-Jewish backgrounds) had to follow aspects of the law. Become a little less to be more...

New believers unsure, it probably didn't sound right, not what Paul had preached when he said forgiveness of sin was available for those that believed in Jesus. But that is what the crowd is going with, so there is shifting away from the gospel as first preached.

A tainted gospel of Jesus plus something else. Grace plus your work. It's no gospel at all. The claim throughout the letter with a re-centering on the actual good news of Jesus that we need even in our day.

Galatians 1:1 "Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—" (ESV)

Not from or through man, and not for man... thematic in this letter. And in the scope of the letter, in the context this one verse lands, we can see dangers of people-pleasing, and the joy of pleasing God.

Dangers of people-pleasing

We should define what we mean here - people-pleasing would be striving for the approval of others in such a way that it shapes how we act and in this case, what we proclaim. The suggestion is that Paul has changed his gospel to make it easier for people to be saved, always telling everyone what they want to hear... (which shows people don't know Paul all that well!)

It is funny that those accusing Paul are likely themselves shifting the gospel of grace to appease segments of the church, to find approval from Jews.

A life and faith oriented toward people-pleasing isn't just one way to live, it is dangerous and detrimental to our health and faith.

a) **Unhealthy Influence**

If our intent is to please man, to find our approval here, we can come under the influence of those that would oppress, abuse, and encourage us away from Christ.

We might find ourselves going along to get along and when we do that long enough we can succumb to the influence of those who would trouble us and distort the gospel of Christ.

Proverbs 29:25 "The fear of man lays a snare, whoever trusts in the LORD is safe." (ESV)

As we saw last week, the church was in danger because they had turned to a tainted gospel, surrendered themselves to the false teaching of the itinerant preachers and were rejecting the gospel of grace and more ghastly, deserting God.

b) **Hypocrisy**

People-pleasing can have us preaching one way and living another - corrupting our witness and dishonoring our Lord.

We will hear more of Peter's story in the coming weeks but this apostle's trajectory helps us see how easy it is to slide into hypocrisy.

One of the twelve, the feisty one, ready to serve and die for Jesus... before he denies him! He eventually gets it together and is restored by the resurrected

Christ. And he will be the first of the disciples to catch a vision that the gospel was to go further than just Israel. Literally, he has a vision of a grand sheet in the sky with all manner of animals and hears God say “do not call unclean what I call clean.” From that place he would go and preach to a gentile family who would believe and be filled with the Spirit.

So you would think Peter would be keen to see Gentiles brought in, freed from sin in Jesus, find life in him and be accepted in.

But we will learn of Peter’s stumbling under unhealthy influence in Antioch as he treats Gentile believers as family but begins to avoid them because men from Jerusalem have come to town. How could a believing Jew be eating bacon?! His hypocrisy influences Barnabas as well...

An instance where Paul will rebuke him to his face, a call to get back to the gospel. The same rebuke coming by way of this letter to the churches in Galatia stumbling into hypocrisy.

If Paul was a people-pleaser he wouldn’t have confronted Peter. Rather than make waves he would have left everyone to themselves to decide what was best for them...

But hypocrisy kills growth, it stunts Christian maturity. And oh man, are we rife in hypocrisy in the church. Mostly because we let it go on!

Men’s Bible study and coming across this verse.. **Proverbs 17:10** “A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.” (ESV) I asked the guys, “when was the last time you were rebuked?”

Controlling for correction from our wives, no one had an example. And I promise it is not because we have so arrived at Christian maturity that we don’t need rebuke or challenge.

We don’t think it’s our place, we don’t want to ruffle feathers. And there is wisdom in some of that, but more likely we don’t want to be that guy... we want to be approved by others so we say nothing when things come out of their mouths that are opposed to the gospel of grace or the way of Jesus. When unhealthy influence is championed. When sin is embraced as a right.

And when we never hear rebuke or submit to it, we never recognize the ways we choose to please ourselves as we please people, we become hypocrites.

c) **Missing the gospel**

As people-pleasers then we have a smorgasbord of silly beliefs that are not in line with the gospel of Christ, and we end up missing the good news because we want to avoid the shame of the cross.

It's scandalous, that a Savior would die on a robber's cross... It's gory, humiliating. And to say that was what we deserved and have to humbly accept for salvation - well that is too much. And what's more, how could we expect other sensible people to believe it and admit they need rescue too?

This is why these believers might be quick to embrace a tainted gospel, because they find themselves embarrassed by what they lack. Earning gives us cred with people, if we can convince those we seek approval from that we are worth it, then maybe we can arrive, and it translates to our faith. Believing becomes a burden and it is no gospel at all. Just an endless cycle of shifting sands of false faith to appease the approval monsters around us.

People-pleasing is dangerous and misses the mark.

“Human approval is divided. Some like you, others dislike you. A split vote. Who can you believe?”

“Human approval is shallow. None of them know your deepest heart. What if they did?”

“Human approval is distorted. Your friends overlook many failings. Your enemies can't see anything right with you. How do you sort it all out?”

“Human approval is unsatisfying. The need of your heart for belovedness goes far beyond anything another sinner can say or do.” Ray Ortlund

This is the Apostle that says “imitate me as I imitate Christ,” he refuses to change his preaching or life to find the approval of man, and he longs for the church to

likewise be so settled in the real gospel that they would turn to Christ and Christ alone.

“People-pleasers don’t make good servants of Christ because people-pleasers cave under pressure from influential people, ignore harmful hypocrisy, and run from the shame of the cross. But more than that, people-pleasers live anxious lives, always worrying about whether they’ll find approval or disapproval from others; and in so doing they will miss the approval that can come only from God himself.” Todd Wilson

There is another way... living to please God

Whoever trusts in the Lord is safe...

Joy of God-pleasing

This is what Paul is about. And what the church should be about. It is what we should strive for.

Joy is a bit of a funny word to use here I realize. Because this life is not easy - you can end up harassed and imprisoned because peeps don’t like how you live for the pleasure of God.

“Of course Paul understands how this works. He knows he too could make his life a whole lot easier if he would only fudge a little on the cross of Christ. He knows his persecution would quickly vanish if he would just quietly remove the offense of the cross. But as a servant of Christ, he won’t do it. Indeed, he can’t do it. In fact, just the opposite: he will not run from the shame of the cross but rather boast in it.” Todd Wilson

But this is what we are meant for.

The gospel free us from our need for human approval because it grants us the approval of God.

That is the claim, that because of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection those that believe in him are given his status in union with him. His inheritance, his righteousness, his secure place with the Father. It is ours.

If you are in Christ, when God looks upon you he sees the countenance of his Son. His declaration over Jesus applies now to you. “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17)

‘Are you sure?’ How can it be, we are so awful, so unlike Jesus... yet the Father sees us as he does his beloved Son? YES! And that is the glory of the gospel. You are so valued in Christ, approved in Him!

This is what we get when we get the gospel that Paul is preaching. Leads to a steadfastness in our embrace of the grace of Christ; an eagerness for others to hear and believe; and the joy of our salvation.

This is who he hopes the churches in Galatia will become, a family of believers joyfully settled in the approval of God in Christ. Anchored to the gospel and not budging an inch!

Frees us to live the way of Jesus because we are not caught trying to prove ourselves.

We become motivated by love - not earning, and this pleases God.

Galatians 5:6 “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.” (ESV)

To become a people who are so rooted in the gospel we work for the renewal of others and all things because we already have tasted the approval of God.

“The gospel removes a "man-pleasing" spirit - the drive to “win the approval of men.” It replaces that spirit with its opposite - not needing to win or seek human approval for what you do. In other words, the gospel produces confident and fearless followers of Jesus, doing what is right without concern for the approval and good opinion of others.” - Tim Keller

“Imagine a father watching his beloved son play baseball for the team his father coaches. As he sits in the dugout, he loves his son fully and completely. If his son forgets his father's instructions and strikes out, it will not change his love for him

or approval of him one bit. The son is assured of his father's love regardless of his performance.

“But the son will long to hit that home run. Not for himself - to gain his father's love - but for his father, because he is already loved. If he doesn't know his father loves him, his efforts will be for himself - to win that love. Because he knows his father already loves him, his efforts are for his father - to please him.”

We do not live God's way in order to become his children, but out of gratitude that we are already God's children.

Unburdened by the need to please people, freed to live the implications of the gospel, kept by Christ forever.

"Only the eternal love of your heavenly Father can fill the voids in your soul and give you a secure identity in an ever-changing world." Keith Ferguson

This isn't a humanistic mantra of nor caring what people think. "PC," we don't use Jesus as our excuse to be a jerk. But we live to please God in love. In the way we set aside our rights for others. In the way we love even our enemies.

And it informs how we live among each other. Lending our approval of one another because we have been approved in Christ. "(Healthy) Human approval is a blessing. The loving favor of true friends is a gift from God. Receive it cheerfully, with thanks to him. And be sure to give it out to others in generous measure every day. They need it too." Ray Ortlund

Let the **approval of Christ** sink deep. Go to this well often.

Live to **please God**. Embrace the gospel for yourself and others. Bring this shalom to bear in all of life. That others would believe.

“People-pleaser or servant of Christ? Which are we? People-pleasers have an inordinate desire to please other people; servants of Christ have an all-consuming passion to please God. People-pleasers are motivated by the fear of man; servants of Christ are inspired by the fear of God. People-pleasers pretend to serve God

when they really intend to serve themselves; servants of Christ actually intend to serve God by meeting the needs of other people. People-pleasers are anxious for approval from others and distraught when they don't get it; servants of Christ simply love others and leave approval or disapproval to the judgment of God.”
Todd Wilson

Approval in Christ frees us to live in light of the gospel for the pleasure of God.

In Christ you have the “like,” the only one you need. Rejoice in that and live free.