

Wanting to Please
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Gal 1:10

(NA 28th ed.)

(Darby)

Ἄρτι γὰρ ἀνθρώπους πείθω ἢ τὸν θεόν; For do I now seek to satisfy **men** or God?
ἢ ζητῶ ἀνθρώποις ἀρέσκειν; or do I seek **to please men**?
εἰ ἔτι ἀνθρώποις ἤρεσκον, If I were yet **pleasing men**,
δοῦλος οὐκ ἂν ἦμην. I were not Christ's bondman.

Darby says “men,” which is woodenly literal, but most modern translations go for the broader, gender-accurate meaning, “people” or “human beings.” Paul is Christ’s “bondman,” or “servant,” and thus seeks to only please his Master. “Please” is from *aresko*, as in “Ballet Aresko.”

Notice that Paul pits pleasing God and pleasing man as opposing principles. He does not seek to please people, but God—as if you cannot do both.

Of course, this is a particular kind of “pleasing.” Another kind of “pleasing” we are positively called to do. “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up” (Rom 15:2). “I try to please everyone in everything I do” (1 Cor 10:33). These verses use the same Greek word as Gal 1:10. The difference isn’t in what word is used, but the context for it.

We are called to “please” everyone in the sense that we do what we can to build people up in the faith. We don’t please ourselves, but live as helpers to others (Rom 15:3). We don’t take advantage. We don’t put up unnecessary obstacles that would hinder people from growing in the faith. We like to see people happy in their dealings with us, for then we are like Jesus to them.

That is a healthy, godly, spiritual kind of “pleasing” of people. It is good to live to please others ahead of ourselves. It is good to be generous and unselfish, loving. But what Paul is talking about in our verse is an entirely different kind of pleasing. He says it again in 1 Thess 2:4, “We speak, not to please man, but to please God.”

The faithless and ungodly way of “pleasing people” is entirely different—even though from the point of view of what people can see, they may look the same. It has to do with motivation. What drives you to behave as you do with people? Are you trying to please them so that they will feel good about you, and does this pump you up with good feelings? Is that why you are willing to do so much for _____ ? (fill in the blank)

Are you motivated by desiring them to like you back? If so, then you will never have the courage to speak a word of correction into their lives. You will be shy about Jesus and the gospel with them, if you strive to “please” them in this way.

Do you crave their respect? If so, it will be very difficult to be a “fool for Christ,” to unabashedly say and do things that you know they don’t respect—like frame the issue for them in a God-honoring way.

If you seek to please people in the wrong sense, you will always be intimidated, your witness will be crippled, you will accomplish much less for Jesus that you are called to do. The way out of this sorry situation is to repent of putting people—or a certain person even—in the place of God in your heart.

By not disciplining his sons, Eli honored them more than God, and God took it personally (1 Sam 2:29). Jesus saw through the outward religiosity of the Pharisees, saying “They do all their deeds to be seen by others” (Matt 23:5). This kind of kowtowing, showmanship, attention-getting behavior is the bad sort of “pleasing” people that is antithetical with pleasing God.

The way out is by repenting of this—and by actively seeing yourself as a servant of Christ. You have to put off wrongly-motivated people pleasing, and put on pleasing Christ. Always second-guess your motives. Why did you say that to that person? Was it flirting? Was it flattery? Was it calculated to get a response? Was it self-aggrandizing? Was it borne of a psychological need?

Or was it love?

Something to think about.