

People-Pleasing

David & Saul Pt.9: Fear of Man pt.2 Selected Passages

Summary: Generally we are to please all men, but sinful people-pleasing (the behavior that rises out of man-fearing) is when human praise is a priority over God's, self-glorification (leading to hypocrisy and blindness) is the goal, or when it leads to compromise. The solution is God-pleasing. It is possible for a Christian to displease Him and to please Him. Overcome people-pleasing by trusting in God's promise to honor and praise you, and by loving God's glory more than your own.

1 Samuel 15:24 Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the LORD's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them.

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Review

We have been studying the life of David. And in the book of 1 Samuel David's life is displayed against the backdrop of the train wreck of Saul's life – especially in chapter 18. If you were to divide chapter 18 into an outline you would very quickly notice a clear pattern. Here is how the chapter divides up. It has nine sections:

- David's** popularity (1-7)
- Saul's** Jealousy (8-12)
- David's** Successes (13-16)
- Saul** offers his first daughter (17)
- David** humbly declines (18-19)
- Saul** offers his second daughter (20-22)
- David** doubles the price (23-27)
- Saul** realizes the Lord is with David (28-29)
- David** keeps having more success (30)

The outline is very clear - David, Saul, David, Saul, David, Saul, David, Saul, David. The writer is going back and forth between these two men and showing us a stark contrast. So it is

necessary for us to understand what is going on in the heart of Saul if we want to study the life of David. That is why we are spending so much time on Saul.

Remember, any time you study Scripture you take your cues about which things are especially important from the text itself, not from your own preconceptions. And the Lord spends a lot of time in these chapters giving us insight into Saul's heart. Read chapter 18 especially and you will see a whole lot about Saul's thoughts, motives and feelings, but nothing about David's thoughts, motives and feelings. God wants us to learn from the error of Saul. And when you look inside the heart of Saul one of the things that stands out is fear of man. His fear of David is mentioned repeatedly in chapter 18, and his fear of man in general has been a theme ever since chapter 15.

And I told you last time that we see at least three different kinds of fear of man in the heart of Saul. In chapter 15 it is fear of human disapproval. In chapter 17 it is fear of harm. And in chapter 18 it is fear of loss. So we are taking those one at a time. We spent a lot of time last week thinking through why it is that fear of human disapproval is presented in Scripture as such a wicked thing. We found that it is a trap, it is idolatry of self, it is idolatry of others, it is dishonesty, it destroys fellowship, and it destroys love.

Man-pleasing

Man fearing is the attitude behind the behavior of man pleasing

This morning I would like to devote the whole time to just giving you some background from Scripture on the concept of people-pleasing. Remember the connection between man-fearing and man-pleasing - fear of man is the attitude of the heart, and people-pleasing is the behavior that results from that attitude.

Good man-pleasing

There are some contexts, however, in which people-pleasing is a good thing. In fact, we are commanded in Scripture to please people.

Commands to please people

For example, children should seek to please their parents (Pr.23:24-25, Ex.20:12). And all of us should seek to please those in authority in general. You should seek to please your boss or husband or teacher or whoever the Lord has placed in authority over you (Ro.13:1-7).

Tit.2:9 Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, 10 ... so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

The norm in marriage is for a married person to try to please his or her spouse (1 Cor.7:32-34). We should seek to please our neighbor rather than ourselves in areas of Christian freedom that could cause someone to stumble.

Ro.15:1-2 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. ² Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

And Paul taught us to become all things to all men in order to win them. (1 Cor.9:19-22). And so in that sense we even try to please unbelievers. So the only people you should be trying to please are those in authority over you, your spouse, Christian brothers and sisters, and non-Christians. We are commanded to please everybody!

Bad man-pleasing

But on the other hand you have passages that strongly condemn people-pleasing.

Commands to Please God, not man

Gal.1:10 Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

1 Thes.2:4 We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts 5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed-- God is our witness. 6 We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.

So how do you draw the line between the good kind and the bad kind of man-pleasing? Well, our first hint comes from the contrast those two passages I just read draw between people-pleasing and God-pleasing.

People-Pleasing above God-Pleasing

People-pleasing becomes sin when it becomes more important to you than pleasing God. That is infidelity. If your wife cared more about pleasing the guy next door than you that would be a problem. Our affections belong to God.

1 Cor.7:23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

When you are a people-pleaser you enslave yourself to the people whose approval you are trying to win. Whatever it is that is required to please them - that is the law for you. Life is hard for people pleasers, because instead of one Master they have thousands (pretty much everyone they meet). [And many of them are cruel, hard, and impossible to please masters.] And enslaving yourselves to them is unfaithfulness to God. The good kind of people-pleasing is always done in order to please God – not instead of pleasing God. So people-pleasing is bad when it occupies more of your thoughts than God-pleasing.

People-Pleasing for Self-glorification

Another kind of bad people-pleasing is when it is done for self-glorification.

1 Thes.2:6 We were not looking for praise from men

It is not wrong to desire honor. Scripture offers that as a reward from God. (Ro.2:7, 1 Cor.4:5, Jn.12:43). What is wrong is to try to arrange for it yourself instead of just waiting for God to give it. God has promised us glory and honor in His time, but people-pleasers want it now. And they want it from people – not from God. And they want it from certain people of their own choosing. They are not content to just let God be in charge of who likes them and who does not. They want to take charge of that.

And it is amazing how subtle our efforts to get praise from people can be. Some of us have turned fishing for compliments into an art. We do not want to be exposed as man-pleasers, and so we are very careful. We will ask people their opinion in one area in the hopes they will take the occasion to praise us in another area. “What did you think about the setup of the stage today – was I standing too close to the pulpit when I *preached my sermon*?” (And of course Tracy is supposed to respond by saying, “Oh, speaking of your sermon – that was the greatest sermon anyone has ever

preached.”). Or we bring up topics of conversation that will lead toward an area where we feel we have done well. Or you praise someone else who did something similar to what you did in the hopes your name will also come up. Or the old standby – we criticize ourselves in the hope someone will disagree.

And fishing for compliments is just one of a thousand ways we seek self-glorification. Sometimes it takes the form of getting angry when someone is not grateful for something you have done. Other times it takes the form of tearing other people down all the time. Other times it takes the form of taking special note of what things certain people are impressed by so you can say and do those things. It can be as overt as flat-out bragging, or as covert and hidden as an envious attitude in the heart when someone else receives praise - “*Why does she get so much praise for that when I’m just as good as her?*” Or even, “*I would be as good as him if I just didn’t have this and that obstacle....*” “*If I didn’t spend all my time with my studies I could be a superstar athlete too.*”

Self-glorification causes hypocrisy

It is all self-glorification. And self-glorification is what causes hypocrisy. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for self-glorification in Matthew 23. And six times in 11 verses Jesus calls them hypocrites. The word “hypocrite” means “one who wears a mask.” It is when you pretend to be something you are not. And it is caused by the self-glorifying effort to impress people. (Can you think of any other reason why someone would be a hypocrite?). When your main goal is to cause people to be impressed with you, you will focus all your energy on that which man sees – the outside. And you will not worry about the part God looks at – the inside. You will work hard to clean up the outside of the cup and the dish, so your life looks clean to people.

Self-glorification causes blindness

So man-fearing leads to sinful people-pleasing, and that leads to self-glorification through hypocrisy. And then hypocrisy leads to spiritual blindness. And five times in this same section Jesus tells them they are blind. That is no coincidence. The reason people-pleasing for self-glorification leads to both hypocrisy and blindness, is because when you live to impress people, and you succeed, you will think you are righteous just because everyone at church thinks you are righteous. And you will be oblivious to sins that people do not see. There are plenty of sins that you can commit in your heart that will not cut down at all on the amount of praise you get from people in the church, because they are unseen. In fact, we might even praise you for them because they look so much like godliness on the outside. And so you become blind to those sins because you measure yourself by human praise rather than by God’s Word.

People-pleasing and compromise

A third kind of people-pleasing that is forbidden is any compromise of the anything in God’s Word for the sake of winning someone’s favor. There is a movement in the church today known as the Emergent Church movement, and that movement is all about becoming all things to all men in order to win as many as possible. That was a noble goal to begin with, but it led to an attitude that prized acceptance from the culture more highly than fidelity to God’s Word. And so now that whole movement is filled with everything from compromise in the area of morals all the way to compromise of the gospel itself.

Contextualization

Becoming all things to all men (1 Cor.9:22) means we must give up neutral cultural traditions that might offend other cultures when we are trying to reach those cultures. For example, you do not impose Jewish traditions on Gentiles. We must contextualize the Gospel so that it is understandable to the interested and willing. It is bad to preach the Gospel in such a way as to

obscure its relevance to the listener. It is bad to have a snobbish, unloving, unwelcoming, inhospitable, exclusive or indifferent attitude toward the lost.

Compromise

All of that is what it means to become all things to all men. Those are all good kinds of man-pleasing. However, we must never contextualize Jesus or the Gospel. We adjust *ourselves* – not Jesus or the message. Paul adapted himself to the customs of those he was trying to reach. He never adjusted the gospel or biblical morality.

In our shrewdness, we must never contaminate God’s methods with human wisdom, because that would empty the Gospel of its power. (1 Cor.1:17) We must realize that preaching will not have a broad appeal to the masses of unbelievers unless you rip out the offensive parts. The message of the cross, if preached accurately, will be a stumbling block and foolishness to most (1 Cor.1:23).

And contextualization of ourselves must only be in areas of morally neutral customs. In moral issues we must “come out from among (the world) and be separate” (2 Cor.6:15-18) and “have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.” (Eph.5:11). There should be a stark, immediately noticeable contrast between us and the world in affections, motives, speech, and actions. (Php.2:15) Going into the bars and drinking and partying with them in ways that approximate their sinful lifestyle, and using speech that is increasingly profane and coarse so they do not think we are goody-two-shoes is not the way to reach them. Our efforts to win their friendship and movement toward them must never occur in the areas of their vices. (Jas.1:27) And when we start making the worship music or anything else in the Church more about pleasing the world than about pleasing God we have fallen into sinful man-pleasing.

So the bad kind of people pleasing is when impressing people is more important to us than pleasing God, or when our motive is self-glorification, or when our desire to please people causes us to compromise God’s Word or Christian morality.

God-pleasing

The solution to man-pleasing is God-pleasing

So how do we defeat this sin in our lives? The solution to man-pleasing is God-pleasing.

Gal.1:10 Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Remember the Ephesians four principle – you always get rid of a sin by forcing it out of your life with the corresponding virtue. You do not get rid of anger by just trying to get less angry. You force that sin out of your life with whatever virtue is missing (patience, love, humility, contentment, etc.) You force the sin of laziness out of your life with the virtue of diligence. You force the sin of gossip out of your life with the virtue of love. You force greed or lust or any other kind of covetousness out of your life with the virtue of delighting in and desiring and being satisfied by nearness to God. You force fear of man out of your life with the virtue of fear of God. And you force people-pleasing out of your life with the virtue of God-pleasing. And that works, because you cannot do both. You cannot live as a people-pleaser and a God-pleaser at the same time.

It is possible to displease Him

Now I know for some of you the whole idea of pleasing God is a difficult concept. You hear all this talk about trying to please God and you say, “Wait a minute. That sounds like works.” There are many who teach that it is wrong to put forth effort to try to please God or gain His approval.

And I think the reason for the confusion is the fact that people think of pleasing God or acceptance in God’s sight only in terms of our positional standing in Christ. In Christ we are fully accepted by God and as pleasing to Him as Jesus Himself. We can add nothing to that through our efforts, because the Father is already as pleased as He can possibly be with Christ. However there is another sense in which God is pleased or displeased with us in varying degrees depending on what we do. It is possible, as a believer, to displease God and have Him turn His face away from you.

Ps.13:1 ... How long will you hide your face from me?

Micah 7:9 Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD's wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right.

Avoiding His displeasure and seeking His pleasure are valid motives

So avoiding God’s displeasure and seeking His pleasure are both valid motivations for the Christian life.

Eph.4:30 do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God

2 Cor.5:9 So we make it our goal to please him

1 Thes.4:1 Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.

In Ephesians 5:10 Paul describes the Christian life as a life of discerning what pleases God. That is what the Christian life is – facing every decision with the question “What would be most pleasing to God?” That is what sets us apart. There are a lot of really nice, upright, moral non-Christians. But they are not doing the moral things they are doing because they want to please the Lord Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul says that one of the advantages of singleness is your ability to focus on pleasing the Lord without having the distraction of having to please a spouse. (vv.32-33)

Heb.13:16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

1 Tim.5:4 if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family ... for this is pleasing to God.

1 Jn.3:22 we receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

Col.1:10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way

Heb.13:21 may he work in us what is pleasing to him

If anyone ever tries to teach you that it is not necessary to put forth effort to please the Lord that person is a heretic. Do not listen to him. Listen instead to Paul, who said, “We make it our goal to please Him.” (2 Cor.5:9).

So realize that the pleasure of God in our lives is dynamic. Sometimes it is less. Sometimes it is more, depending upon our obedience and repentance.

It is possible to please Him!

Others of you might be thinking, “I don’t have any problem believing it is possible to displease the Lord. My problem is it seems impossible to please Him.” It’s mind-boggling for us to try to grasp how an infinitely holy, perfect God could look at sinful creatures like us and be more pleased one day than the next - when both days we fell infinitely short of His holiness. And so the logic that rises out of ignorance sometimes overrides what we know the Bible says, and we develop a kind of subconscious attitude that God is mostly unhappy with us. It seems like such an absurdity to think that a microscopic, sinful speck of dust like me could ever do anything that would bring pleasure in the heart of an infinite God in heaven who is already eternally blessed, and perfectly happy. I honestly do not even know what it means for an infinitely joyful God to be made happy in a certain moment in time. I do not understand it, but I believe it, because the Bible clearly says it.

God is not mostly unhappy with you

I sin so often, so egregiously, so persistently. And my repentance is so lame and half-hearted. From my perspective it just seems like God’s main attitude toward me would have to be disappointment, with only occasional times of being pleased – if any at all. But Scripture says just the opposite.

Ps.30:5 For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime

The point of that statement is to contrast the amount of time God is angry with us with the amount of time God is favorable toward us. It is a moment compared to a lifetime.

Isa.26:20 Go, my people ... hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by.

Not only is it possible to please God sometimes, but if you are a believer God is pleased with you most of the time. He is displeased when you disobey Him, but that is short-lived and is much less frequent than His pleasure in you. Paul summarizes the Christian life in Php.2:1 as a life of being encouraged by Christ, comforted by His love, having fellowship with the Spirit, and receiving tenderness and compassion from Him. That is the norm in the Christian life. And if that does not describe your experience with Christ, there is a good chance you are interpreting things wrongly.

Don’t interpret all trials as God’s anger

If there is any positive interpretation that can be made of God’s dealings toward you, make it. Some people are too quick to assume God’s wrath. They suffer the slightest difficulty and they interpret it as God’s anger or chastisement. Just because your clutch went out does not mean God is angry with you. It might, but by itself it probably does not. When you interpret every difficulty as chastisement you are making the same error as Job’s friends. Maybe God made your clutch go out in order to prove to Satan that you would still be faithful to Him even when your clutch goes out. Maybe the reason you lost your job was because if you stayed there one more month you would face some devastating temptation. Maybe the reason you got the unexpected bill or the flu or the

call from the IRS or the F on your midterm, or a herniated disk, is because God is using pain to prepare you for some task that will resound to His glory throughout eternity.

When you suffer, search your heart. Is there unrepentant sin? If so, then it is probably a good assumption that your suffering is either chastisement or at least a kind of shot across the bow warning you about possible chastisement. But if your conscience is clear, do not assign a negative meaning to what is happening. Doing that as a default assumption is not loving toward God. Think about it – how would you like it if people did that to you? If every time you said “no” to your kids they burst into tears and assumed you were angry at them? What if you have a friend who, every time you did not do exactly what she wanted, barraged you with fifty questions about what she did to make you mad? You would want to say to them, “Look, don’t assume I am mad all the time. What have I done to make you think I am such an angry person?” What has God done to make you assume that He is an angry, impossible to please ogre who does nothing but punish you every day?

God’s good pleasure

Php.2:13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good pleasure.

The term “good pleasure” is an interesting word. It is used numerous times in both the NT and the Greek translation of the OT. But that word has never been found anywhere prior to the Greek Bible.¹ And even after the writing of the Greek Bible it is rarely found outside of Christian and Jewish writings. It is a concept that is not natural to human religion. But it is *crucial* for true religion. What God is doing in your heart is making Him happy – that is why He is doing it. If it is hard for you to conceive of God in heaven with a big smile and a loud laugh and great delight in response to something you do, then your theology needs correction. If you cannot picture God being greatly pleased in response to something you do, you have an unbiblical, incorrect view of God.

Just think of all the things the Bible says that please God. God is pleased when you walk with Him (Gn.5:24, Heb.11:5, 1 Thes.4:1-3), obey your parents (Col.3:20), maintain purity (1 Thes.4:1-3), prefer godliness to riches (1 Ki.3:10), offer your body to Him as a living sacrifice (Ro.12:1), say no to a sin because of Judgment Day (2 Cor.12:9), give up a freedom so as to avoid causing a brother to stumble (Ro.14:18), separate yourself from the world (Eph.5:10), fear Him (Heb.13:15-16), praise Him (Heb.13:15-16), trust Him (Heb.11:6), desire His will (1 Thes.4:1-3), bear fruit (Col.1:9-10), increase in the knowledge of God (Col.1:9-10), when you are thankful (Heb.12:28), when you support missions (Php.4:18), share (Heb.13:16). Have you ever done any of that? Do you, in fact, do a number of those things on a fairly routine basis? What does that tell you about how God feels about you? If you are a Christian God is grieved by your sin, and He does become angry, but that is the exception, it is temporary, it is short-lived, and most of the time He is pleased with you.

People are bad masters

This is a wonderful truth for the people-pleaser, because while God is possible to please, people are not. Their souls cannot be satisfied by anything but God. So when you try to please them you will run headlong right into Proverbs 27:20.

Pr.27:20 Death and Destruction are never satisfied, and neither are the eyes of man.

¹ Kittle.

You are not going to be able to satisfy them. Not only that, but in your vain effort to please them they will often require that you do things that ultimately harm you. Giving them what they want is not always in your best interests or in theirs. Your wife might want you to put the family in financial trouble to buy her the things she wants. Your husband might want you to stay home from church with him. Society might want you to do whatever it takes to fit their image of beauty – even if it means starving yourself. Your boyfriend might want you to get drunk with him or sleep with him. Your boss might want you to lie for him.

People-pleasing is ultimately impossible, and even the effort is costly. But pleasing God requires nothing that is ultimately not in your best interests. God never asks you to give up anything that would be for your greatest good, because all the things that are most beneficial for you are the very same things that most glorify Him.

How to Overcome man-pleasing (by faith)

How do we overcome this sin of people-pleasing? The same way you overcome any sin – by faith.

1 Jn.5:4 This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

You defeat sin by trusting in God's great and precious promises. And the passages that condemn sinful people-pleasing also give us insight into which promises will help us become God-pleasers.

Love praise from God more than human praise

Jn.12:42-43 ...many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved honor from men more than honor from God.

The problem was not just that they liked being honored or receiving praise. There is actually nothing wrong with enjoying praise from men. The problem comes when your desire for that is greater than your desire for honor and praise from God. So the promise that will help us is the promise that God will praise us and honor us.

Now, does that statement make anyone uncomfortable? It sounds strange, doesn't it? But it is right there in Scripture – as plain as day. Look again at verse 43. The sin of those leaders was a failure to love praise from God more than they loved praise from men. God has promised us praise, and He expects us to be more motivated by that promise than we are by our desire for human praise. And God repeats that promise many times in Scripture.

1 Cor.4:5 ... He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

So the promise is that on Judgment Day we will be honored by God (receive glory from Him), and be praised by Him.

Ro.2:7-10 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

¹⁰ There will be glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good

The ones who get eternal life on Judgment Day are the ones who during this life sought glory and honor from God (v.7). And God will reward them with glory, honor, and peace (v.10).

Ro.2:29 ...circumcision is circumcision of the heart ... Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God

2 Co.10:18 For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends

Jn.5:44 How can you believe? While accepting honor from one another, you don't seek the honor that comes from the only God.

The proof that they were unbelievers was the fact that they were not only seeking honor from one another but that they were not seeking honor from God.

1 Sam.2:30 ... Those who honor me I will honor

When Judgment Day comes God will honor, praise, and commend the righteous. In fact, we even have some examples of exactly the kind of things God will say.

Mt.25:21 His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful

**Mt.25:34-35 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.
³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat...**

So how do you defeat the sin of man-pleasing and trying to be in charge of your own honor? You defeat that sin the same way you defeat all sin – through faith. You trust in the many promises God has made to give you glory and honor if you just wait on Him. You think you want it from people – but the only honor that will really satisfy your soul is the kind that comes from God. And if you have trouble remembering that, just use all of your desires for human approval as memory cues. For some of us that would mean being reminded a hundred times a day.

And let the desirability of human praise serve as an illustration of how wonderful this praise from God is going to be. We do not desire praise from everyone or in every context. In fact, some praise just makes us feel downright uncomfortable. But there are certain contexts in which affirmation from certain, key people feels so good. The other day Tracy did a small favor for a friend and that friend was so thankful. What Tracy did was really a small thing, but it was just one of those favors that just really hit the spot. Her friend thanked her profusely, then later she thanked me, then her husband sent me an email and thanked me. And I thought to myself as I was preparing this message, *This really feels good – I can see how a person could fall in love with the approval of those he loves.* In certain circumstances, coming from the right person, human approval can taste so sweet. When you taste that sweetness, let your enjoyment of it serve as a memory cue that the enjoyment of having God be pleased with you like that will be infinitely greater. Everything you are trying to get through man-pleasing you can get in far greater measure through God-pleasing. We need to become like Jesus, who could see things as they really are, and so He saw how relatively worthless human praise was.

Jn.5:41 I do not accept glory from men

Jesus did not accept glory from men because He knew how worthless it was. It does not mean anything when a blind person tells you that you look nice, or when a deaf person loves your singing. When people who did not know what they were talking about and who were not following the Holy Spirit complimented and flattered Jesus it meant nothing to Him. But it meant everything to the Pharisees.

44 How can you believe if you accept glory from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the glory that comes from the only God?

God's approval meant nothing to them, but peer approval meant everything. They loved having blind people tell them they were beautiful. But praise from the blind meant nothing to Jesus – or to Paul. Paul did not accept praise from blind people even if one of those blind people was himself.

1 Cor.4:4-5 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵ 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. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

Do delight in God's praise through the mouths of men

What about when someone does have some spiritual insight and his praise reflects the heart of God? Is it okay to desire that? Yes! We should treasure that, because that is praise from God even though it comes through a human instrument. We should treasure it and delight in it, but we should not seek to bring it about. Again, just do all you can to please God and let God be in charge of who praises you and when and how much and for what.

The fact that praise from God can come through the mouth of people can sometimes makes it hard to discern whether you love praise from God or praise from men. But if you ever struggle with that, just ask yourself – “How do I feel when I have God's approval and not man's?” When you do something you know for sure God is pleased with, but no human being even notices – are you depressed or are you filled with joy? If there is sadness in your heart even while you have the approval of God then you know the approval of God is not a high enough treasure in your heart.

God will glorify us by associating us with Himself

A minute ago when I said God will honor and praise you, and it sounded so strange to our ear, there is a good reason why it sounds strange. It sounds wrong because we know Isa. 42:8 says

Isa.42:8 I am the LORD... I will not give my glory to another

God is the only one worthy of glory, and He will glorify us? The word I translated “honor” in Jn.12:43 is actually the word normally translated “glory” (doxa). So it literally says God will glorify us. How can God do that if He is the only one worthy of glory? The answer is this – God will glorify us in a way that does not compete with, but rather that *accentuates* His glory. He will glorify us in the eyes of the rest of the creation by associating us with Himself. He will glorify us by pulling us to His side and saying, “He is with me.”

Mt.10:32 Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.

God will not share His glory with us – He will magnify His glory by showing how He can take worthless, disgusting, sinful, rebellious specks of dust and make them into spectacular, glorious beings who are righteous and who have eternal, unending delight in God.

Love God's glory more than your glory

So the first solution to people-pleasing is to love praise from God more than you love praise from men. Another solution is to love God's glory more than your own glory. Receiving glory and honor from God is a wonderful thing that magnifies God's glory all the more, but self-glorification is an ugly thing that dishonors and displeases the Lord.

Mt.6:1 Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them.

Any time you have the goal of causing people to be impressed with you, you have lost sight of the goal of glorifying God. Just 15 verses later Jesus said this

Mt.5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

The issue is not whether people see your good deeds or not. The issue is why you want them to be seen – do you honestly desire God's glory or yours?

Being thought foolish for God's sake

2 Cor.5:13 If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

Paul was perfectly happy to be thought an absolute imbecile in the eyes of men if it meant bringing glory to God. Paul: "When I make a fool of myself it is for the sake of God, and when I don't make a fool of myself let it be for the benefit of people." None of it was for his own glory.

Let's do that. Let's fix our attention so resolutely on the glory of God that if it means people think we are idiots, so be it. And if we are ever thought well of, let's use that as a tool for glorifying God and loving people. And when we find ourselves craving affirmation, or praise, or honor – or just someone to tell us "thank you for all your hard work" let's turn that desire into longing for honor from God and for that Day when He will come in glory and glorify us by drawing us by His side.

Benediction: 1 Kings 10:8-9 Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you ...Because of the LORD's eternal love for (you)

Devotionals

Pleasing God

1 Samuel 18 (contd) Day 1

The solution to man-pleasing is God-pleasing.

1 Thes.2:3-5 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. ⁴ On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵ You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed-
- God is our witness.

Gal.1:10 Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Sometimes people think of pleasing God or acceptance in God's sight only in terms of our positional standing in Christ. In Christ we are fully accepted by God and as pleasing to Him as Jesus Himself. And since the Father is perfectly pleased with Christ, there is no way to do anything to increase that.

However there is another sense in which God is pleased or displeased with us in varying degrees depending on what we do. When we sin He is displeased and when we do what is right He is pleased. And so avoiding God's displeasure and seeking His pleasure are both valid motivations for the Christian life.

2 Cor.5:9 So we make it our goal to please him

Eph.5:10 find out what pleases the Lord.

1 Thes.4:1 Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.

1 Cor.7:32-33 I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs-- how he can please the Lord. ³³ But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world-- how he can please his wife--

Heb.13:16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

1 Tim.5:4 if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

1 Jn.3:21-22 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

Col.1:10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God

Heb.13:21 may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

What an amazing thought it is, dear Lord, that I could do something that would generate pleasure in Your great heart! You are infinite and all-powerful and You have all wisdom and knowledge and Your sovereignty and supremacy are absolute; which means You can (and do) bring about whatever You choose to do. Nothing can prevent You from bringing about that which You desire. And so the thought that a worm like me could offer anything to You that would actually give You joy is unfathomable. I don't even know what it means for an infinitely joyful God to be made happy in a certain moment in time. I don't understand it, but I believe it. Oh, what an amazing privilege!

In my flesh I tend to feel that You are mostly unhappy with me. I sin so often, so egregiously, so persistently. And my repentance is so lame and half-hearted. It just seems like Your main attitude toward me would have to be disappointment, with only occasional times of being pleased. That is kind of how I feel about myself, and I feel surely Your standards must be far higher than mine. And yet the picture You give in Scripture is just the opposite – that for Your children there is mostly favor that is the rule punctuated by times of displeasure that are the exception.

Ps.30:5 For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime

What unspeakable joy would fill my heart if I really understood this. Dear Lord, enable your servant to make some progress in understanding this today.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who is able to be pleased by us, and who is mostly pleased by us.

Promise to trust: He will work in me what is pleasing to Him

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Joy, motivation, desire for righteousness, hope, encouragement

Pleasing God

1 Samuel 18 (contd) Day 2

So how do we defeat this sin in our lives? The solution to man-pleasing is God-pleasing.

Gal.1:10 Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Remember the Eph.4 principle – you always get rid of a sin by forcing it out of your life with the corresponding virtue. You force the fear of man out of your life with the virtue of the fear of God. And you force people-pleasing out of your life with the virtue of God-pleasing. And that works, because you cannot do both. You cannot live as a people-pleaser and a God-pleaser at the same time.

Perhaps you hear all this talk about trying to please God and you say, “Wait a minute – that sounds like works.” There are many who teach that it is wrong to put forth effort to try to please God or gain His approval.

It is true that in Christ we are fully accepted by God and as pleasing to Him as Jesus Himself. We can add nothing to that through our efforts, because the Father is already as pleased as He can possibly be with Christ. However there is another sense in which God is pleased or displeased with us in varying degrees depending on what we do. It is possible, as a believer, to displease God and have Him turn His face away from you.

Ps.13:1 ... How long will you hide your face from me?

Micah 7:9 Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD's wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right.

So avoiding God’s displeasure and seeking His pleasure are both valid motivations for the Christian life.

Eph.4:30 do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God

2 Cor.5:9 So we make it our goal to please him

1 Thes.4:1 Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.

Heb.13:16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

1 Tim.5:4 if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family ... for this is pleasing to God.

1 Jn.3:22 we receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

Col.1:10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way

Heb.13:21 may he work in us what is pleasing to him

If anyone ever tries to teach you that it is not necessary to put forth effort to please the Lord that person is a heretic – do not listen to him. Listen instead to Paul, who said, “We make it our goal to please Him.” (2 Cor.5:9). So realize that the pleasure of God in our lives is dynamic. Sometimes it is less, sometimes it is more, depending upon our obedience and repentance.

Teach me to fear Your displeasure, dear Father. Forgive me for assuming I have Your approval when I don't, and for taking so lightly Your warnings.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God whose displeasure is a fearful thing

Promise to trust: He will deal with me according to my obedience

What will result if I experience this attribute today: motivation, fear of God, desire to obey

Pleasing God

1 Samuel 18 (contd) Day 3

It's mind-boggling for us to try to grasp how an infinitely holy, perfect God could look at sinful creatures like us and be more pleased one day than the next - when both days we fell infinitely short of His holiness. And so the logic that rises out of ignorance sometimes overrides what we know the Bible says, and we develop a kind of subconscious attitude that God is mostly unhappy with us. It seems like such an absurdity to think that a microscopic, sinful speck of dust like me could ever do anything that would bring pleasure in the heart of an infinite God in heaven who is already eternally blessed, and perfectly happy.

Dear Father, I sin so often, so egregiously, so persistently. And my repentance is so lame and half-hearted. From my perspective it just seems like Your main attitude toward me would have to be disappointment, with only occasional times of being pleased – if any at all. How amazing are Your words...

Ps.30:5 For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime

The amount of time You are angry with me compared with the amount of time You are favorable toward me is a moment compared to a lifetime!

Not only is it possible to please God sometimes, but if you are a believer God is pleased with you most of the time. He is displeased when you disobey Him, but that is short-lived and is much less frequent than His pleasure in you. Paul summarizes the Christian life in Php.2:1 as a life of being encouraged by Christ, comforted by His love, having fellowship with the Spirit, and receiving tenderness and compassion from Him. That's the norm in the Christian life.

Thank You, blessed Savior, for all the encouragement You have given me through Your nearness to me, and for all the comfort that has carried me through suffering, and for all the fellowship with Your Spirit, and for all the tenderness and compassion. And thank You that those things are what characterize my Christian life! Chastisement and discipline exist, but in such small measure they are not even mentioned in the summary! Oh Lord, Lord, You are compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness, forgiving sins and showering us with blessing!

Php.2:13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good pleasure.

The term “good pleasure” is a concept that is not natural to human religion. But it is *crucial* for true religion. What God is doing in your heart is making Him happy – that is why He is doing it. If it is hard for you to conceive of God in heaven with a big smile and a loud laugh and great delight in response to something you do, then your theology needs correction.

Just think of all the things the Bible says that please God.

God is pleased when you...

- walk with Him (Gn.5:24, Heb.11:5, 1 Thes.4:1-3)
- obey your parents (Col.3:20)
- maintain purity (1 Thes.4:1-3)
- prefer godliness to riches (1 Ki.3:10)
- offer your body to Him as a living sacrifice (Ro.12:1)
- say no to a sin because of Judgment Day (2 Cor.12:9)
- give up a freedom so as to avoid causing a brother to stumble (Ro.14:18)
- separate yourself from the world (Eph.5:10)
- fear Him (Heb.13:15-16)
- praise Him (Heb.13:15-16)
- trust Him (Heb.11:6)
- desire His will (1 Thes.4:1-3)
- bear fruit (Col.1:9-10)
- increase in the knowledge of God (Col.1:9-10)
- are thankful (Heb.12:28)
- support missions (Php.4:18)
- share (Heb.13:16)

Ever do any of that? Don't you do a number of those things on a fairly routine basis? Then God is pleased! If you are a Christian, God is grieved by your sin, and He does become angry, but that is the exception, it is temporary, it is short-lived, and most of the time He is pleased with you.

Thank You, dear God, for working Your good pleasure in me!

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who is able to be pleased by us, and who is mostly pleased by us.

Promise to trust: He will work in me what is pleasing to Him

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Joy, motivation, desire for righteousness, hope, encouragement.

Pleasing God

1 Samuel 18 (contd) Day 4

How do we overcome this sin of people-pleasing? The same way you overcome any sin – by faith – trusting in His promises. And the passages that condemn sinful people-pleasing also give us insight into which promises will help us become God-pleasers.

Jn.12:42-43 ...many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved honor from men more than honor from God.

The problem was not simply that they liked being honored or receiving praise. There is actually nothing wrong with enjoying praise from men. The problem comes when your desire for that is greater than your desire for honor and praise from God. So the promise that will help us is the promise that God will praise us and honor us. It sounds strange, but it is right there in Scripture – as plain as day. Look again at verse 43. God has promised us praise, and He expects us to be more motivated by that promise than we are by our desire for human praise. And God repeats that promise many times in Scripture.

1 Cor.4:5 ... He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

Ro.2:7-10 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

¹⁰ **There will be glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good**

Ro.2:29 ...circumcision is circumcision of the heart ... Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God

2 Co.10:18 For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends

Jn.5:44 How can you believe? While accepting honor from one another, you don't seek the honor that comes from the only God.

1 Sam.2:30 ... Those who honor me I will honor

We even have some examples of exactly the kind of things God will say.

Mt.25:21 His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful

Mt.25:34-35 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat...

So how do you defeat the sin of man-pleasing and trying to be in charge of your own honor? You trust in the many promises God has made to give you glory and honor if you just wait on Him. You think you want it from people – but the only honor that will really satisfy your soul is the kind that comes from God. And if you have trouble remembering that, just use all of your desires for human approval as memory cues.

And let the desirability of human praise serve as an illustration of how wonderful this praise from God is going to be. We do not desire praise from everyone or in every context. In fact, some praise just makes us feel downright uncomfortable. But there are certain contexts in which affirmation from certain key people feels so good. In certain circumstances, coming from the right person, human approval can taste so sweet. When you taste that sweetness, let your enjoyment of it serve as a memory cue that the enjoyment of having God be pleased with you like that will be infinitely greater. Everything you are trying to get through man-pleasing you can get in far greater measure through God-pleasing.

We need to become like Jesus, who could see things as they really are, and so He saw how relatively worthless human praise was.

Jn.5:41 I do not accept glory from men

It doesn't mean anything when a blind person tells you that you look nice, or when a deaf person loves your singing.

Teach me, dear Father, to delight in praise from You alone. When someone who does not know my heart praises me let me see that for what it is – the accolades of a blind man about how I look. Let it occupy a small place in my affections.

And when I receive praise from someone who does have some spiritual insight, and his praise reflects Your heart, let that thrill my soul because of the fact that it is from You. And if there is ever a choice between human approval and Yours, let it be an easy choice for my heart. Create in me a heart that has a ravenous appetite for Your approval alone.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who glorifies Himself by honoring His saints

Promise to trust: He will honor me by acknowledging me as His

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Joy, motivation, hope, encouragement.

Pleasing God

1 Samuel 18 (contd) Day 5

Isa.42:8 I am the LORD... I will not give my glory to another

Mt.10:32 Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.

How can God glorify us when He is the only one worthy of glory? He will glorify us in a way that does not compete with, but rather that *accentuates* His glory. He will glorify us in the eyes of the rest of the creation by associating us with Himself. He will glorify you by pulling you to His side and saying, “He’s with me.” He will not share His glory with us – He will magnify His glory by showing how He can take worthless, disgusting, sinful, rebellious specks of dust and make them into spectacular, glorious beings who are righteous and who have eternal, unending delight in God.

Oh, eternally glorious Father in heaven, glorify Your name! Nothing is better than the display of Your glory in Your creation. No more beneficial thing could happen to the creation, and no more wonderful thing could happen period. Nothing would honor You more and nothing would profit us more. The promises You make about what happens when we see Your glory are beyond any other promises that could be conceived of.

Oh dear Father, let that be my hope. I live with so little thought about the coming glory. It should be the driving motivation for my life, and in reality it is rarely a conscious motive for much of anything I do. Teach me how to make that the focus and delight of my soul, dear Father. That day when you draw me by your side and somehow actually accentuate and adorn Your infinite glory by including me into it – on that Day when You will not be ashamed to call me Your Son before all my enemies and announce that You are (and have been) pleased with me – Oh what joy shall fill my heart! What joy should fill my heart right now just thinking about it. And yet I am so dull. Please, dear Father, awaken Your servant’s heart. Open my eyes that I might see the wonders of this promise. Every time I enjoy receiving praise, or I have a longing for praise that I don’t receive; let that remind me about the appetite in my soul for honor from You.

And teach me to love Your glory more than my own. Forgive me, dear Father, for seeking to glorify myself, or to arrange for myself to be honored. I leave that in Your hands dear Lord. If I am honored, let it be done by Your hands, and let it be for the good of Your people. And if I am dishonored and ridiculed, let it be for Your glory that I might be full of joy.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who glorifies Himself by honoring His saints

Promise to trust: He will honor me by acknowledging me as His

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Joy, motivation, hope, encouragement.