

Gal. 1:10; I Thes. 2:1-8; Slaves of Christ I. Man's Approval II. God's Approval III. Christ's Servant

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, do you like the approval of others? Some of us here do not like to cause waves- we like peace. Now to be clear, being a peace maker is a Biblical quality- Paul himself calls us to live at peace with all men as much as we can. However, this desire for peace must never interfere with our speaking the truth. Last week our passage ended on a rather strong note. Anathama! God's curse was pronounced on those who preach another gospel. Paul is not winning any favors here! No one would accuse him of being a people pleaser- but that was in fact what his foes were saying! Paul, you act like a Jew sometimes and other times you act like Gentile. You are all things to all people!

Timothy you had circumcised while Titus you forbid from being circumcised. What is going on? Are you changing your message to fit the people? So today Paul is going to clarify his position as a servant of Christ. We see this theme: Jesus Christ commands His servants to live and speak for the approval of God.

I. Man's Approval

In our first point, Paul starts our verse with a pressing question. Am I seeking the approval of man? Am I trying to please man? Paul does a little self- evaluation here- I used to live for the pleasure of man- but am I still doing that? So how or when did Paul live for the praise and approval of man? Well, remember that in Paul's earlier life he had been raised to the highest ranks in Judaism. He had been taught by the right teachers- his actions were of the highest zeal! He was a committed Pharisee-a Hebrew of Hebrews- boasting the flesh and traveling the countryside to catch these followers of Jesus- while earning the praise of Jewish leaders. But the question before us is this- is Paul still trying to please man? Is he still working for the approval of others? So what does this look like? Was Paul changing the message of the gospel in order to pacify or persuade men? Was his aim to get them to agree by way of his eloquent speech? So we start by considering this question : what does it mean to seek the praise of men- specifically for a preacher of the gospel? Well, to seek the approval of men is to seek their

applause. To try to make them happy. To accommodate your life or your speech for the sake of other's feelings or desires. So what then is the gospel that man approves of? The gospel that man approves of is the gospel of cheap grace. You are fine, your works are good enough. God is in your corner, they say. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life they say. And how does man respond to this gospel? Well, I can stay as I am and be fine. So man demands, tell me what I want to hear! Tickle my ears- tell me soft and soothing words. Sing me to sleep. No more of this sin and hell and judgement stuff. I want to be entertained! That is the gospel that man approves of. Even the false prophets in the days of Jeremiah were saying- Peace, Peace- when there was no peace! They were lightly healing wounds without dealing with the deeper issues of sin and repentance from it. Like putting a band aid over a bullet hole- not really fixing the issue. Just live this way and God will accept you. There is a grave danger for pastors who like to be people-pleasers. To live and preach for the praise of men- to lie in order to say what people want to hear or to avoid topics that might offend. But this applies to the congregation as a whole- when we start to adjust our expectations to fit with the masses. The populous cannot be wrong we think. The majority of people determines what is acceptable. As if public opinion could change what was true! Man's desire is the standard- we approve of what we like. Do you remember that old cereal commercial- kid tested and mother approved. Well, these false apostles were preaching a gospel that was approved by men which made them quite popular! In Paul's day- the gospel that man praised was that of identity politics, formalism, race superiority and works righteousness. Anything that focussed on the external was pleasing to the ears. For those coming out of Judaism, the ceremonies and the rituals were hard to give up. Tradition is binding because it is tradition- we have always done it that way. For the Gentiles and Greeks- the approved of gospel was anything based on human logic and reasoning. To bring this into the present day, the vast majority of mega churches continue to preach a gospel that is approved of by man and is pleasing to man. The prosperity gospel. God has a wonderful plan for your life. He wants you to be happy, healthy and

wealthy. And on the Roman side, they have their traditions and rituals that continue to this day. This is the mentality of man- go along to get along. Don't change or challenge anything. Before we get into our next point, why do people desire to please others? Most people want to please others because they are motivated by flattery or some other self-seeking desire. If I tell you what you want to hear, you will tell me what I want to hear. I will scratch your back if you scratch mine! But more than just craving the praise of men, Paul identified another motivation in I Thes. 2:3. People tend to speak with flattering words as a pretext for greed! Not only does it feel good to get a pat on the back when you flatter others- there is usually an ulterior motive of greed! It is the love of money that motivates people to say what they say! Jesus identifies this in Matthew 6- when you love money- money becomes your master! But we have to ask ourselves, is this the message that God approves of? Not what is soothing and pleasant to man- but what is pleasing to God?

II. God's Approval

So we move on into our second point, what is the gospel that God approves of- one that is pleasing to Him? We all want to hear, "well done good and faithful servant." But how do we know what God approves of? The gospel that God approves of is clear- that Jesus came to save sinners of whom I am the worst. That He saves us! That by grace we have been saved through faith- not of ourselves- but as a gift of God! What kind of preacher does God approve of? One who proclaims this truth in season and out of season! One who preaches the full council of God. Rightly declaring that mankind is sinful and can be saved only by the grace of God! Now this message- the message of the true and pure gospel- is hard; even offensive to the ears of men. This truth does not sit well with us. We are sinner in line for judgement. We are born and conceived in iniquity- unable to do any good. The belief of the populous is wrong- majority belief does not make right. In fact, crowd mentality and what comes natural to fallen man is almost always wrong! What matters is not what people think- but what God thinks! At the end of the day, your eternity is not held in the arms of public opinion but on the scales of divine justice. How

does God view you? What does He approve of when it comes to preaching? What is pleasing in His sight? As we read from I Thes. 2, the apostles had been approved of by God to speak the gospel. So they were speaking, not to please men but God! It should be on the heart of every pastor- that their sermon is proclaimed in the audience of One! It really does not matter what the congregation thinks- but what does God think! Is He pleased by the words that are spoken? So Paul will be unmoving and unshakable in this regard- He will speak and preach to the praise and approval of God and not man. To clarify- Paul was willing to be all things to all people. He was flexible and charitable when possible; but when it comes to the gospel, he remained unmoved and unswerving! So Paul begins this letter by not only defending the purity of the gospel of God, but his own motives were also pure! Those who hunt after the praise of men cannot faithfully serve Christ! Faithful preaching will always be unpopular- that is the offense of the gospel!

III. Christ's Servant

After asserting that he was not seeking man's approval- that his ministry was not seeking the praise of man but the approval of God- Paul concludes this verse by asserting his identity as a servant of Christ. Specifically, anyone who chases after the approval of man and the praise of people will not be a faithful servant of Christ. Or as James says, friendship with the world is hostility towards God. Paul was, and all those who are committed to the gospel must be willing to stand firm on this truth. Great teachers and preachers of the past have been willing stand against the word- when they knew they were standing on the truth of the gospel. Men like Jeremiah, or Augustine and Luther. Here I stand, I can do no other! The world may be against me. I am a servant of Jesus Christ- I am not my own- I serve not my own interests. I serve at the pleasure of another. When Paul referred to himself as a bondservant, he was highlighting the fact that he was purchased. He was owned- in the possession of another. He was a slave- working for the master. Jesus remains his Lord- his master- his sovereign. And it to the Lord alone that Paul will give allegiance. He felt compelled to preach. As he also said in I Cor. 9:16,

“necessity is laid upon me. Wot toe me if I do not preach!” He knew that he was serving his master- and he must obey! As Jesus would say in Matthew 6, no one can serve two masters. Either he will love the one and hate the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. Paul is not confused- he knows where his place is. He belongs- body and soul- to his faithful savior! Those who belong to a master are not free to say whatever they want- they are not free agents. He will not go rogue or off script- he will be an obedient servant. So it stands that all who have been purchased by Christ are His- to serve as He pleases. But this service is also liberating! Since Paul is a servant of Christ- He has also been set free from slavery to sin. Although now a servant, we are also part of the family of this benevolent master! The chains of deceit have been broken and no longer hold. Not only are we to serve because we must- it is also our desire to serve Him who has purchased us.

To conclude, seeking the praise of men will cost your soul. Loving the praise of men- or the rewards that come from appeasing them- has lasting consequences. You cannot serve two masters! If Jesus is your master, then you will seek God’s approval. We do in fact belong to a faithful Saviour- we have been purchased- but now we are called to a lifetime of faithful service. Since we belong, you will desire His approval of your work. And when it comes to the gospel- the message that God approves of is clear. Jesus died to save sinners from hell. And the life that God approves of is also clear- obeying Christ in joyful obedience. Jesus Christ commands His servants to live and speak for the approval of God. So may we live for God’s praise as faithful servants- and may we all embrace the true gospel of God.