

Serving Christ, not pleasing people (Galatians 1:10)

Trouble-makers had entered the churches in Galatia and apparently were accusing Paul of adjusting his message and practice merely to please people. They were advancing a distorted gospel, a non-gospel, and were attempting to discredit the messenger of the true gospel in order to open a platform for their false gospel. Astonished that the Galatian believers would so quickly desert God, Paul declares anyone who preaches a contrary gospel “accursed” or *anathema*. That should have demonstrated that Paul was not concerned with pleasing people, but rather God, and thus show how he was a servant of Christ. This gives two principles for us to guard against people-pleasing.

I. *People pleasers do not “anathematize” false teachers.*

1. In Paul’s rhetorical questions we can seek a number of potential references.
 - a. He referred to the *anathema* of verses 8–9.
 - b. Opponents probably accused Paul of accommodating his message and practice to his audience, practicing circumcision among Jews but not requiring it of Gentiles in order to make the message more appealing.
 - c. Paul’s varying practice was actually consistency for the gospel. Paul could have Timothy, whose mother was Jewish, circumcised (Acts 16:3), but refused it for Titus, a gentile (Galatians 2:3–5), because it was a gospel issue. His willingness to become “all things to all people” (1 Corinthians 9:19–23) reflected personal limitations and was not a change in the gospel.
2. Circumstances can put pressure on the messenger to distort the gospel to please people, such as the demand of Jews for signs and of Greeks for ‘wisdom’ (1 Corinthians 1:22–23).
 - a. The Jewish demand for signs was seeking displays of power, which also had evidenced itself in the history of Israel (e.g., Deuteronomy 13:1–3; 1 Kings 22; Jeremiah 28). There is a similar desire among some today for “signs” and a “power” message. But Paul wrote that Christ is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:24).
 - b. Greeks wanted wisdom, the wisdom of this world (1 Cor 1:20–22), requiring eloquence and human logic. When the resurrection seemed foolish, they rejected the message (cf. Acts 17:22–31; s.a. 2 Kings 5 for the example of Naaman). Today’s “logic” requires a person doing something or being something to be saved, contrary to the true gospel.
 - c. There is a temptation to make the gospel sound “reasonable”. As a result a message like Paul’s on Mars Hill would not be preached by some.

We proclaim the true gospel, because it is necessary to honor Christ and to present what people need to hear to be saved.

II. *People pleasers cannot be servants of Christ.*

1. Paul knew personally the distinction between being a people-pleaser and a servant of Christ. Paul had been a Pharisee with impressive credentials (cf. Philippians 3:4–6). But Jesus warned of Pharisees who practice their righteousness to be seen (Matthew 23:5, 6:1). Paul changed from someone who sought to please people to someone who sought to please God, as a servant of Christ, as seen in his ministry in Thessalonica after persecution at Philippi (1 Thessalonians 2:1–7).
2. Jesus taught that you cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13).

The principle applies to the conflict between God and money, as well as generally between light and darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14–16). Jesus also contrasted light and dark, making it clear that you cannot please or serve both (cf. John 3:19; 7:7).
3. Paul’s broader ministry shows how to be a servant of Christ and not have people as our masters, seeking first to please them.

Avoid wrong motives, flattery, seeking praise, and claiming or acting as if we know more than we do. The gospel may not always be “pleasant” to hear, but it is always good news. Don’t give in to what others want to hear, but proclaim Christ and Him crucified. A gospel presentation may not always seem “intelligent” but it is always wise. We make disciples of Christ, not ourselves; we seek praise from Christ, not people.

Followers of Jesus Christ should be on guard against those who seek to please people and desire to distort the message of Christ to do so. Their message deceives because it sounds pleasing. Neither should believers be people pleasers. You would be choosing a master other than Christ if you adjust the gospel to please people. Serve Christ, and don’t seek to please people.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- What are essential elements of the gospel and what are “people-pleasing” alternatives to guard against?
- Do debates about certain parts of the gospel (e.g., accepting Christ as both Savior and Lord) excuse us from a correct proclamation? Why/why not?
- How does being a servant of Christ affect your motivation to proclaim a non-accommodating gospel?