

## Pleasing God and Man

**Reading: Luke 2:52** “.... And Jesus increased .... in favour with God and man ...”

### **Introduction:**

From the scripture reading, we see that, as Jesus was growing up into adulthood, He increased in “.... *wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man ...*”. Now some may ask; “*How can someone on the one hand be striving to lead a life that is pleasing to God, and at the same time be pleasing to man?*” Isn’t there such a difference between the two that it would be impossible to please both? After all, most of the desires of man are not the same as the desires and will of God. Man’s focus is usually on the world (**Romans 8:5a**), whereas God’s focus is on the eternal (**Matthew 25:34**).

Therefore, as Christians, how can we pleasing to both God and man, and still be consistent in our beliefs, morals and ethics? Is it possible to please both without compromising what is right and true?

In this lesson, we will consider from the scriptures the answers to these questions about how we are to be pleasing to both God and man.

## **LESSON**

### **1) Pleasing God**

a) We are commanded to be pleasing to God

For the Christian, pleasing God is to be the number one priority. He is the Lord God Almighty (**Revelation 4:8b; 11:17**). He is our creator (**Revelation 4:11**). We are His children (**2 Corinthians 6:18**). And when our time here has ended, it is God to whom we must ultimately give account of ourselves in judgement (**Romans 14:12**).

On more than one occasion, when writing to the churches in the first century, the inspired apostle Paul commanded and exhorted the brethren to live a life that was pleasing to Him;

*“.... that you walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work ....”<sup>1</sup> **Colossians 1:10***

*“Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God.”*

**1 Thessalonians 4:1**

b) A response to God’s love

While the above commands alone should be sufficient for us to want to live in a way that pleases God, there is another source of motivation for doing so – the love that He has shown towards us. As sinners, we stood condemned before Him (*implied in* **Romans 3:23; 8:1**). We deserved to be punished and banished from His sight (**Matthew 25:41**). And there was nothing that we could do, in and of ourselves, to change that (**Ephesians 2:8-9**).

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotes are from the New King James Version (NKJV) Bible.

## Pleasing God and Man

But in spite of our failings, God still loved us. His love and concern for us was such that He was prepared to go to extraordinary lengths in order to save us - He sent His own Son to be crucified on a cross to pay the penalty for our sins (**Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:9-10**). Love begets love, and so, because of the love that He has shown towards us, our natural response should be to love and to please Him in return (**1 John 4:19**).

### c) How do we live a life that is pleasing to God?

We know that those who choose to live their lives with worldly attitudes and actions cannot please God (**Romans 8:5-8**). And we also know that without faith it is impossible to please Him (**Hebrews 11:6**). Therefore, as Christians, we do we need to do? As in all things, we look to Jesus as our example (**1 Peter 2:21**).

Jesus lived a life that was pleasing to the Father (**Matthew 3:17; 17:5; John 8:29b**). And what was it that Jesus did that caused the Father to be “*well pleased*” in Him? Firstly, He loved the Father, and secondly, that love led Him to be obedient to the Father (**John 14:31**). Note the connection in this verse between love and obedience. Jesus said that in order for the world to know that He loved the Father, He did what the Father commanded Him to do<sup>2</sup>. He was obedient “... *even to the point of death ...*” (**Philippians 2:8; Hebrews 5:8**).

In **John 14:15**; Jesus said; “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*” Obedience - doing what God commands us to do - is how we demonstrate our love for Him (**John 14:21a; 1 John 5:2-3**). Obedience is not “legalism”. It is the faithful response of a person who has a genuine love for the Father<sup>3</sup>. It involves “... *finding out what is acceptable to the Lord...*” (**Ephesians 5:8-10**), and then doing it; living it (**Ephesians 4:17 f.f.**). We can’t call Him our Lord, and at the same time not do what He requires of us (**Luke 6:46; Acts 2:36**).

**Point:** When we love God and keep His commandments, then we are well pleasing to Him (*e.g.* **Hebrews 13:16**).

## 2) Pleasing man

### a) What does “pleasing men” in a Biblical way mean?

When the Bible talks about “pleasing men”, what exactly does it mean?

- does it mean that we are to do whatever makes people happy, regardless as to the ethics or morality of what we are doing?
- does it mean that we help people to fulfil their all of their desires, whatever they may be?

To answer these questions, we need to look closely at what the verses which talk about pleasing men are actually saying, and the context in which they were said. For example, look at what the apostle Paul said in **Romans 15:2**;

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<sup>2</sup> See also **John 6:38; 15:10b; 17:4**.

<sup>3</sup> Some people may indeed take a legalistic approach to obeying God’s Word. But obedience to God from a grateful and loving heart is actually faithfulness (**Romans 1:5; 6:17-22; 1 Peter 1:13-6**).

## Pleasing God and Man

“... let each of us please his neighbour for his good, leading to edification ...”.

Notice two things here;

- i) The context: In verse 1, Paul is telling those who are strong and mature in the faith to bear with the failings of those who are weak. The previous chapter has been talking about those who have an issue with eating certain types of foods, *etc*, and that others should not do things that cause offence to them, even if it involves a personal sacrifice.

Sometimes, we can get impatient with the new in Christ and expect them to be able to instantly give up their former sinful conduct and attitudes (**Ephesians 4:22**). But while some may be able to do it quickly, others may need more time. And so the strong are to put aside their own expectations or frustrations about the progress of others, and be considerate of the weak. **Romans 15:3** follows the same thought. Jesus put aside His own personal desires and well-being, and took upon Himself the penalty for the failings of others.

The point is this – think of others, not just yourself. Consider what is best for them; consider how you can best meet their needs (**Philippians 2:3-4; 1 Corinthians 10:24**).

- ii) The aim: The reason why Paul exhorted the strong to bear with the failings of the weak and to please his neighbour was this – edification. The aim was not to help the weak fulfil any worldly desires that they may have, for that would not be for their good (**1 John 2:15-16**). Rather, it was to help and encourage them to grow in the faith (**Hebrews 12:12-15**). If the strong were to be harsh and judgemental towards the weak, it would most likely cause the weak to become discouraged, and to give up, jeopardising their salvation.

These same principles can be seen in **1 Corinthians 10:32-33**, another passage that talks about “pleasing men”;

*“Give no offense, either to the Jews, or to the Greeks, or to the church of God just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved”.*

Paul exhorted the Corinthians to make sure that that they did not cause offence to anyone, be they people inside the church or out. And as for his own actions, he didn’t do things to simply suit himself or with the intention of making some sort of personal gain (**1 Corinthians 8:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9**). Rather, he did what he did for the benefit of others, and what he was ultimately trying to achieve was their salvation.

- b) In what practical ways can we please men?

So in what practical ways are we to please men? Well, we can see from **1 Corinthians 10:32-33** above that we should not deliberately try to offend or annoy people<sup>4</sup>. To do so would be wrong, and would hinder attempts to reach out to the lost with the gospel.

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<sup>4</sup> While we should not set out to offend others, there will be times when some will be offended when faced with the truth – e.g. **Mark 6:1-3**.

## Pleasing God and Man

But for the best example of how to Biblically please men, we should look to Jesus. From the context of **Luke 2:52**, the phrase that Jesus “... grew .... in favour with God and man ...” is most likely referring to the years when Jesus was growing up into adult hood. We don't have much of a biblical record of what He did during those years, but we can certainly see how He conducted Himself as an adult. Below are four of the qualities that He showed towards His fellow man;

i) He was compassionate, merciful, and responsive

- to those who were spiritually lost (**Mark 6:34**), so He taught them.
- to those who were hungry (**Matthew 15:32**), so He fed them.
- to those who were sick (**Matthew 14:14**), so He healed them.
- to those who mourned (**Luke 7:13**), so He comforted them.
- to those who had sinned (**John 8:3-11**), so He forgave them.

Jesus could empathize with people, and followed the principle found in **1 John 3:17** – He met their needs.

ii) He loved His enemies

Jesus followed His own teaching with regard to loving your enemies (**Matthew 5:44**). He did not do this in the hope that they would not harm Him, for He could call on legions of angels if necessary to protect Himself (**Matthew 26:53**). He did it because that is the nature of God (**Romans 5:8-10**). Two examples of this love can be seen at the time of His arrest and execution, when He restored the ear of Malchus (**John 18:10-11; Luke 22:50-51**), and when He asked God to forgive those who had crucified Him (**Luke 23:34**).

iii) He held no prejudices

Jesus did not discriminate against people based on their race, sex or social status. He spoke kindly to the Samaritan woman at the well – a woman who had been married and divorced several times (**John 4:3-26**)<sup>5</sup>. He spent time with those who were rejected by society – tax collectors and “sinners” (**Matthew 9:10-11**). He healed the demon possessed daughter of the Gentile woman from Canaan (**Matthew 15:21-28**).

iv) He set a good example for others to follow

Jesus obeyed the Law – perfectly, He did not sin (**Hebrews 4:15**). In order to try and accuse Him, the leaders of the day had to bring in liars (**Matthew 26:59-60**). Even Pilate and Herod found no fault with Him (**Luke 23:13-15; John 19:4**).

There will always be some people who will spend their time looking for ways to “tear down” or criticize those who try to live a godly life (**1 Peter 2:11-12**) – Jesus often faced it (e.g. **Mark 7:1-9; 12:13**). But at the end of the day, most people will acknowledge and have respect for those who live righteously (**Acts 2:42-47a**).

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<sup>5</sup> Traditionally, the Jews never had dealings with Samaritans (**John 4:9**).

## Pleasing God and Man

Pleasing men does not mean pandering to their every whim or desire. It is about “.. *loving your neighbour as yourself* ...” (**Matthew 22:39**). It means doing what is good and edifying for them (**Galatians 6:10**). It also includes not being harshly judgemental towards them (**Matthew 7:1-5; James 4:11**), or trying to make life difficult for them (**Romans 14:13**). Rather, the best way that we can please men is to help them to come to know, understand, and obey the truth - both through teaching and by example (**Matthew 5:13-16; Philippians 3:17; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7-8**).

### 3) When pleasing men conflicts with pleasing God

There are times where we cannot please both men and God at the same time. We have examples of this in the New Testament;

- **Acts 4:1-21; 5:17-40** When the apostles started spreading the gospel in Jerusalem, the chief priests (who had plotted to have Jesus killed – **John 11:47-53**) ordered them to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. But to “please” the chief priests would have meant disobeying the command from Jesus to “... *be witnesses of Me in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth..*” (**Acts 1:8**).

Therefore, the apostles had to make a decision – do we please God or man? They chose to continue preaching the gospel in order to please God (**Acts 5:29**), because it is to God to whom we must ultimately give account (**2 Corinthians 5:10**).

- **Galatians 1:10** In the early days of the church, it did not take long before the gospel message was changed by some people. An example of this was the binding of parts of the Old Covenant (*e.g.* circumcision – **Acts 15:1, 24**) onto New Testament Christians. There were others who changed the gospel so that it became a message that people wanted to hear, rather than what God wanted them to preach (**2 Timothy 4:1-4**). Such “gospels” do not lead people to salvation – they lead to destruction (**2 Peter 2:1-3; 18-19**).

In the first chapter of **Galatians**, Paul was quite emphatic that there is only one gospel<sup>6</sup>, and anyone who preached something different was to “...*be accursed...*” (**1:8-9**). Now his exhortation may not have made some people happy, but he said what he said in order to be a faithful servant of Christ, pleasing God (**1:10**)<sup>7</sup>.

As mentioned earlier in this lesson, one of the key aims of pleasing men is to lead them to Christ (**Romans 10:1; 15:2**) - it is not about pleasing men for pleasing men’s sake. We cannot lead people to Christ if we compromise the truth. We may be able to make them “happy” by doing so, but the end result would be that they come to know something different to the one pure truth. Therefore, if we reach a point where pleasing men requires us to diminish or disregard God’s Word, then we need to follow the example of Peter - we need to “.... *obey God rather than man*” (**Acts 5:29**)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> See also **Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 John 4:1**.

<sup>7</sup> See also **1 Thessalonians 2:4**.

<sup>8</sup> In **John 6:66**, when people turned away from following Jesus after hearing Him teach, Jesus did not chase after them to work out a “compromise” so that they would keep following Him.

## Pleasing God and Man

### **Conclusion:**

Jesus grew in favour with God and man. He lived a life that was pleasing to both, because He did what was right and proper.

We are to be like Jesus. We are required to please God – no question about that (**Colossians 1:10** “... *fully pleasing Him* ...”). We are also required to please men, not in the sense of catering to their every whim, but in living a life that involves “... *loving our neighbour as ourselves* ...”. Such a life brings honour to God. In fact, our relationship with God is very much dependant on our relationship with others (**Matthew 25:31-45; 1 John 3:17-19**).