

INTRODUCTION

If you're not involved in our Student Ministry at Green Acres, you may not know that it's called "The One-Ten Student Ministry." Do you know why? It's not because the Student Center is located on Highway 110. It's because the theme of the ministry is found in Galatians 1:10, a verse we're going to be examining today.

This is the third message from Paul's letter to the churches in the region of Galatia because he was upset that false teachers had already infiltrated the young churches teaching a new gospel. It wasn't the gospel of grace Paul had preached.

I once heard Vance Havner say he had been reading *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale, and then he read Paul's letter to the Galatians. Havner said, "Personally, I find Peale appalling and Paul appealing!" Well, in the case of this letter, it's not a play on words to say Paul was simply appalled by what was happening in the churches. These false teachers were telling the Gentiles that they had to become Jews before they could become Christians, a message some of the Jews in Jerusalem endorsed.

When Paul wrote this letter he was still somewhat of a "newbie" in the Christian ministry. The real Jewish-Christian VIPs were in the church in Jerusalem. Now, when you're on an upward career path like Paul, human wisdom says one should try to impress the VIPs, the "big boys." You should go-along to get-along. But not Paul. Here's what he had to say about changing his message to impress others.

Galatians 1:10-12. "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. I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."

A verse must be pretty powerful if a ministry chooses it as its name. And in this case it is a good choice. Most people spend their lives trying to please others, but Paul challenges us to take the road less traveled and live our lives to please God. That's a pretty important matter to settle in your own life. Are you living to please others, or to serve God? In this message I want to talk about the Perils of People-pleasing, then I'll talk about the blessings we receive when we live to please God.

I. THE DISEASE TO PLEASE: SYMPTOMS OF APPROVAL ADDICTION

Everyone wants to be liked. When actress Sally Field won her second Oscar for her role in the 1984 movie *Places in the Heart*, she gave a memorable acceptance speech. She said, "I haven't had an orthodox career, and I've wanted more than anything to have your respect. The first time I didn't feel it, but this time I feel it, and I can't deny the fact that you like me, right now, you like me!" Many of us, like Sally Field, think we are good people only if other people think we are good people.

Wanting to be liked is a natural feeling. I want all of you to like me, and I like all of you—well, most of you. From the time we were children we craved a pat on the head, or a pat on the back. We lived to hear someone say, "Atta' boy!" or "Atta' girl!" We all have a natural appetite for people to like us and accept us. But an addiction is when a normal appetite is corrupted and it starts controlling you. For instance, we have a natural appetite for food, but some people crave food to the point that eating starts controlling them: They have an eating addiction. I didn't know this before this week, but "Approval Addiction" (along with its first cousin Co-dependency) is a recognized as a real issue in the mental health field.

Dr. Annette Colby writes: "An addiction is something that controls people—it is something they feel they cannot live without, or something they feel driven to do in order to relieve pressure, pain, or discomfort of some kind. Someone addicted to drugs, for instance, will do whatever he needs to in order to get another 'fix' when he begins to feel uncomfortable. Approval addiction is much the same, but instead of running to drugs to heal the hurt, those who suffer from it seek people's approval. When they feel unsure and shaky about themselves, they look for a 'fix'—they seek out someone to comfort them and reassure them everything is all right and they are acceptable. Being overly dependent on approval from others, and fearing their disapproval, comes from the belief that others are responsible for our worth."

What are some of the symptoms of approval addiction? If you answer "yes" to at least two of these three questions, you might be an approval addict.

A. I take criticism personally

A people-pleaser will go to great lengths to avoid conflict or criticism. And every word of spoken or perceived criticism stings deeply. To an approval addict the term "constructive criticism" is the greatest oxymoron.

There are always going to be critics. I know a little something about criticism, and let me assure you if you allow the arrows of criticism to wound you, you will never become the person God wants you to be.

There is a fable about an old man, his young grandson, and a donkey. They were entering a city and the boy was riding the donkey as the old man walked alongside. They passed a group of people who remarked that it was terrible for the boy to ride while the old man had to walk. So they listened to the critics and changed places. They went a little farther, and another group said, "What a shame to make a little boy like that walk!" So they listened to their critics and the old man and boy walked beside the donkey. Another group down the road complained that they were foolish to walk when they had a perfectly good donkey. So they listened to their critics and both rode. The next group commented on how cruel they were to put such a burden on the poor donkey. The old man and the boy decided they were right, so they decided to carry the donkey. As they were crossing a bridge, they lost their grip and the donkey fell into the river and drowned. The point of the story is that if you listen to every critic, you'll never reach your goals.

B. I have a fear of rejection

A people-pleaser will do anything to avoid rejection. Someone said that a people-pleaser feels like they are constantly performing in front of a panel of judges. Their life is one long episode of American Idol, and they're singing and dancing away hoping to get a "thumbs up" rather than a "thumbs down." Their judges aren't Randy, Stephen, or J-Lo. Their judges are their friends, family, and usually people they hardly know.

In his book *The Search for Significance*, Robert McGee wrote, "Living according to the false belief I must be approved by certain others to feel good about myself causes us to fear rejection, conforming virtually all of our attitudes and actions to the expectations of others." (p. 66)

When I was growing up, my favorite holiday was Halloween. I can remember first discovering how it worked. You put on a mask and rang a doorbell and you got free candy. What a deal! When I was in the third grade, I went through our neighborhood trick or treating, then I went home emptied the bag, changed into another mask and went around again! I had that thing figured out!

An approval addict is someone who wears different masks. They have a mask they wear at home, another mask they wear at church, another mask they wear at work, another mask depending for different people. They smile when they don't feel like smiling because they fear rejection.

C. I have a hard time saying no

Have you ever said, "yes" to an invitation to do something that you *really* didn't want to do or didn't have the time to do but you didn't say, "no" because you wanted that person to like you? It's good to say, "yes" to good opportunities and projects, but approval addicts overload their calendars, and their lives with tasks that they hope will gain them approval from someone.

I read an interesting quote as I was preparing for this message: "Being a people-pleaser is like being a stray dog at a whistler's convention." That's an interesting picture. Like a stray dog, people pleasers run to the nearest and loudest source of approval.

What a picture! How many of you own a dog? Raise your hand. How many of you own a cat? Put your hand down. You don't own a cat. A cat owns you, and you just pay the mortgage.

Our dog Betsy recently went to doggy heaven, but she was a good example of a people-pleaser. When I came home she would run up to me, and jump up barking, "Master, pet me! Pet me! Pet me!" Sometimes I would be sitting down reading and she would go get a toy and bring it to me and nudge my hand. "Master, play with me! Play with me! Let's have fun!" If I tossed the toy, she would retrieve it and say, "Let's do it again! And again! And again!"

She was happy because she thought she was pleasing me. She was an approval addict. But if she ever chewed something she shouldn't have, or did something wrong, you only had to say, "Bad dog!" You could see her entire personality change as her ears drooped and her tail was tucked and she would skulk away. That part of her day was ruined by my disapproval.

That's the up-and-down existence of a people-pleaser. That lifestyle is fine for a dog, but it's a sad way to live for a person. When you're getting approval, you're on top of the world, but when you face disapproval, your world is ruined.

The Bible says, "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe." (Proverbs 29:25) Can you think of a case study of a people-pleaser in the Bible? Does someone who was trapped by the fear of man rather than trusting God come to mind? There are many, but Pontius Pilate is certainly a great example. He examined Jesus and found no fault in him. He wanted to set Jesus free. But the Bible says in Mark 15:15, "Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed over to be crucified."

So if you think you might be an approval addict, ask the Lord to heal you of the disease to please. Because there IS a better way!

II. WHOSE SLAVE ARE YOU? Seek God's approval instead of people's applause

The theme of Galatians is the freedom that we have in Christ. If you devote your life to trying to please others you will find yourself enslaved to their opinions and approval.

I like Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Galatians 1:10: "Do you think I speak this strongly in order to manipulate crowds? Or curry favor with God? Or get popular applause? If my goal was popularity, I wouldn't bother being Christ's slave." (*The Message*)

The word Paul used was of a common bond-slave. You don't have the emotional energy to serve two masters. In Matthew 6, Jesus referred to serving God or serving Money, but the principle holds true. He said, "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other." (Matthew 6:24)

So how to you make the choice to be a slave to God rather than the approval of people? Here are two ways to begin.

A. Serve God without any desire for recognition

One way to escape the approval addiction trap is to perform acts of service and kindness quietly and secretly so that there is no possibility of someone being impressed. Jesus said the Pharisees were consummate people-pleasers. When they gave money to the poor they would announce it with trumpets so everyone would see their generosity and give them approval. Then Jesus said, "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven...But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:1-4)

If you seek the applause of people for your acts of goodness, that's all the reward you will ever receive—and you forfeit the reward from God. But when you serve faithfully, with no desire for the praise of people, God notices and God will reward you. The happiest, healthiest Christians I know aren't trying to impress other people. They do their good deeds for an audience of One.

There's a powerful poem by Ruth Harms Calkin entitled, "I Wonder." She writes: "You know, Lord, how I serve You/ With great emotional fervor/ In the limelight. / You know how eagerly I speak for You/ At the women's club. / You know how I effervesce when I promote/ A fellowship group./ You know my genuine enthusiasm/ At a Bible study. / But how would I react, I wonder ... / If You pointed me to a basin of water/ And asked me to wash the calloused feet/ Of a bent and wrinkled old woman/ Day after day/ Month after month/ In a room where nobody saw/ And nobody knew."

I know someone who practices this in a unique way. Whenever he arrives at the window of a fast food drive through, he gets great joy from saying, "And let me pay for my friend in the car behind me as well. And just tell them I'm doing it in the name of the Lord." And when that person arrives to pay, they discover someone has already paid for their meal. They have no clue who did it, so God alone is glorified. He does it to please God, not impress people.

B. Live as if the only opinion that matters is God's

We should do this because that's really true. At some point in the future, we are going to face judgment, and we won't be judged by other people, we'll stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Paul wrote elsewhere, "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed I do not even judge myself...it is the Lord who judges me." (1 Corinthians 4:2-4)

So, are you going to choose to go through life trying to please people? If you do, you'll be frustrated. You'll never please everyone. I can remember my friend Adrian Rogers saying, "If you displease God, it doesn't matter whom you please. But if you please God, it doesn't matter whom you displease." But I've discovered that when you commit your life to pleasing God, you discover there are others who are committed to pleasing God, and you will supernaturally live a life pleasing to them as well.

Pleasing people isn't hard: It's impossible. Before these fancy wheel covers we now have on our tires, we used to have hubcaps. Remember? Can you remember trying to put a hubcap back on a wheel? You'd get the top in and the bottom would pop out. Then you'd pound the bottom in and the top would pop out. People are the same way. If you get one group pleased, another group will dislike you, and when you try to please them, another group will pop out against you.

But the Bible makes it clear how we can please God. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek Him." Let's turn that around, "With faith it is possible to please God."

You don't please God by what you DO. You please God by who ARE. Being is more important than doing. God made you as a human being, not a human doing. When you place your total trust in Christ, Jesus comes to take up residence in you through the person of the Holy Spirit. From that moment on, the Bible says you are in Christ and Christ is in you. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." If you are a child of God, when God looks at you He

sees Christ, because you are IN CHRIST. Was the Father pleased with Jesus? Of course! When Jesus was baptized God said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased."

We all have a sense of self-esteem. It is the picture we carry inside our head of ourselves. Just like you carry pictures of your family in your wallet or on your smartphone, you have a picture of yourself inside your head. If you are finding your identity in what others think of you, it's like an Etch A Sketch. Remember those? You could make a picture, then turn it over and shake it and start over. If you are a people-pleaser, your self-image will always be a changing picture of approval, disapproval, disappointment, and frustration. God doesn't use an Etch A Sketch. According to Isaiah 49:16, He has you engraved on the palms of His hands!

But if you live to please God, He will give you a clear picture of who you really are in Christ. You are someone who was made by God and deeply loved by God. You are so precious to God that Jesus said He has even numbered the hairs on your head. God loves you so much according to Psalm 139:18, His thoughts of you outnumber the grains of sand on the seashore.

CONCLUSION

Over the past 18 months, I spent a great deal of my time studying the Parables and Miracles of Jesus. I fell in love with the stories of Jesus. In fact, I'm just finishing writing a book entitled *Jesus—Storyteller*.

So, I want to tell you a story about people-pleasing verses pleasing God. It's a story Max Lucado tells in his book children's book *You Are Special*.

Once there was a village of small wooden people who had all been carved by a woodworker named Eli. These wooden people were called Wemmicks. Eli had carved the Wemmicks into a wonderful variety—no two of them looked alike. Some Wemmicks were tall and some were short. Some wore hats and some wore coats.

All day long, the Wemmicks did the same thing. They gave stickers to each other. Every Wemmick had a box of bright golden stars and a box of dull gray dots. When they saw someone who was pretty or smart, they would put a gold star sticker on them. When they encountered someone who was ugly or dumb, they put a gray sticker on them. Some Wemmicks were covered with golden stars, and others had only gray dots.

One little Wemmick named Punchinello never received a gold star sticker. He tried to jump high like the other Wemmicks but he would just fall and scar his wood, so he got even more gray dots.

Punchinello was covered with so many gray dots that one day he decided he didn't want to leave his house because he was too embarrassed—and he knew if he ventured out he would only get more gray dots.

One day Punchinello saw a Wemmick named Lucia pass his house. She was unlike any Wemmick he'd ever met. She didn't have any stickers at all, no golden stars, and no gray dots. Oh, people tried to put stickers on her; it's just that the stickers didn't stick to her!

Punchinello said to Lucia, "That's the way I want to be—sticker free! How did you do it?" Lucia said, "It's easy. Every day I go see Eli." Punchinello said, "Who is Eli?" Lucia said, "Eli is the woodcarver, and I go and spend time with him in his workshop. Why don't you go up the hill to his workshop? Eli is always there."

Punchinello looked out his window and was saddened when he saw the Wemmicks going through their daily routine of passing out golden stars and gray dots, so he resolved to go visit this Eli. He walked up the hill and stepped into the big Woodcarver Shop. He couldn't believe how large everything was. Even on tippy-toe he couldn't see over the stool. A hammer was longer than his entire body. Punchinello was suddenly afraid and he turned to leave. Then a voice said, "Punchinello, it's so good of you to come! Let me take a look at you."

Punchinello slowly turned around and looked at the large bearded craftsman and said, "Sir, you know my name?" "Of course I do. I made you," Eli said.

Eli stooped down and picked little Punchinello up and set him on the workbench. "Hmmm. Looks like you've been getting a lot of gray dots." Punchinello quickly said, "Oh, Eli, I'm sorry. I didn't really mean to; really I didn't!"

Eli smiled and said, "Oh, you don't have to defend yourself to me, my child. I don't care what the other Wemmicks think. And you shouldn't care either. Who are they to give stars or dots? They are Wemmicks just like you. What they think doesn't matter at all. All that matters is what I think, I think you're pretty special."

Punchinello said, "Me special? How can I be special? I can't walk fast. I can't jump. My paint is peeling. I make silly mistakes all the time, and I'm not a beautiful Wemmick like some of the others."

Eli put his large hands on Punchinello's shoulders and said, "Punchinello, you are mine. That's why you matter to me. You ARE special because I made you and I don't make mistakes."

Punchinello asked, "But why don't the stickers stay on Lucia?" Eli answered, "Because she has decided that what I think is more important than what anyone else thinks. The stickers only stick if you let them. The more you trust my love, the less you care about those stickers."

Punchinello said, "I'm not sure I understand. What are you saying?" Eli said, "You will, but it will take some time. You've got a lot of gray stickers, so for now, just come see me every day and let me remind you how much I care about you."

Punchinello thought, "I think He really means it." And each time he remembered what Eli told him and each he went to visit and talk with Eli, one of Punchinello's dots would fall off. They kept falling off and soon they were all gone!

If you live your life trying to be a people-pleaser you will live only for the gold stars, and what you often get are the gray dots. But if like Punchinello, you'll just spend every day with the Carpenter, you'll find the gray dots and gold stars of people pleasing will no longer stick to you. And you'll live your life to hear these words spoken by your Creator: "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

OUTLINE

I. THE DISEASE TO PLEASE: Symptoms of approval addiction

- A. I take criticism personally
- B. I have a fear of rejection
- C. I have a hard time saying no

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes