

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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Pleasing to God

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Key verse: “Just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts” (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

Comedian and educator Bill Cosby once said, “I don’t know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.”

John Sununu served, in the early 1990s, as White House chief of staff under the first President Bush. One day a reporter asked Sununu if his job was difficult. “No,” came the quick reply. The reporter thought Sununu must have misunderstood the question, so he asked it again. Sununu gave the same response.

Then the chief of staff explained why he felt that his job was not difficult: “I only have *one* constituent.” By that, Sununu meant that his job was to please only one person—the President.

The Apostle Paul was equally clear on his job description. Paul said that his job as a minister of Christ was “not to please mortals, but to please God” (v. 4). Paul explained that this commitment to *please God rather than people* had been demonstrated by the fact that he was willing to face the opposition of people, if need be, in order to please God: “But though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition” (v. 2).

What shameful mistreatment had Paul suffered at Philippi? Before coming to Thessalonica, Paul and Silas had preached and evangelized in Philippi. There they were attacked by an angry mob, stripped, beaten, and jailed (Acts 16:11-24). God delivered them miraculously (Acts 16:25-40). In spite of their persecution in Philippi, Paul and Silas then proclaimed the Good News in Thessalonica, where they again faced severe opposition (Acts 17:1-9).

If Paul’s focus had been popularity and the approval of people, he would not have continued to proclaim Christ in the face of such opposition. But Paul’s mission was clear, and his commitment was to *please God rather than people*.

How about you? Are you a God pleaser or a people pleaser? The writer of Proverbs warned: “Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe” (Proverbs 29:25).

Following Pentecost, Peter and John preached in Jerusalem and saw thousands come to faith in Christ. As a result, the two apostles were arrested and warned by the Jewish leaders to no longer speak about Jesus. Peter and John answered, “Whether it is right in God’s sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Act 4:19-20).

This is an issue that every believer ought to settle in his or her heart: Will I live my life to please God or to please people?

Of course, these two choices are not always mutually exclusive. There is nothing wrong with wanting to please other people, for example, our boss, our spouse, our friends. But our *primary goal* should always be to please God first. The Apostle Paul’s ministry provides a model of what it means to *please God rather than people*.

This passage in 1 Thessalonians 2 also gives us an excellent checklist of the *qualities of a Christian minister/leader*. Paul’s checklist shows us some qualities that should and should not characterize the Christian minister/leader.

Some traits that ought *not* to characterize the Christian minister/leader, according to Paul are: deceit, impure motives for ministry, and trickery (v. 3); flattery, greed, and an unhealthy need for other’s people’s praise (vv. 5-6).

Some traits that ought to characterize the Christian minister/leader, according to Paul are: gentleness (v. 7); caring (v. 8); personal responsibility (v. 9); and a spirit of fatherly (or motherly) encouragement (v. 12).

Any of us who lead, in the home or in the church, would do well to prayerfully evaluate our lives and ministries by these criteria.

Paul’s example is a motivational challenge in many areas. But none is more significant in this passage (1 Thessalonians 2:1-12) than this question: *Am I a God pleaser or a people pleaser?*

In 370 A.D., Basil of Caesarea, one of the “church fathers,” became the archbishop of Caesarea, which brought him into a conflict with the emperor Valens. In an effort to scare the bishop into compliance, Valens sent his imperial guard to intimidate Basil with the threat of punishment. Basil responded by saying that he was ready and eager to die for Christ, and that he owned so few possessions that imprisonment or confiscation of his property wouldn’t mean anything to him.

When the imperial guard complained that no one had ever talked to them that way, Basil answered that perhaps they had never met a bishop before: “When the interests of God are at stake, we care for nothing else.”

I like this quote, too, by Robert Baker: “As I grow older, I care less what people think about me and more what God thinks of me. I expect to be with him much longer than with you.”

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