



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Examining the text & our hearts:

*Bible Reading: Galatians 1:6-13*

- “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are following a different gospel — 7 not that there really is another gospel, but there are some who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we (or an angel from heaven) should preach a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be condemned to hell! 9 As we have said before, and now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let him be condemned to hell! 10 *Am I now trying to gain the approval of people, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ!* 11 Now I want you to know, brothers & sisters that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. 12 For I did not receive it or learn it from any human source; instead I received it by a revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you’ve heard of my former way of life...” (Gal. 1:6-13 NET)
- **SUMMARY:** Galatians 1:10 is often overlooked, yet it’s a key statement of Paul’s *modus operandi*—not to please people, but to be a God-Pleaser. These are mutually-exclusive options—you either please people, or God; you cannot do both. Today there’s intense pressure to please people at school, work, & via social media. Too often we’re governed by others’ approval/disapproval; we aren’t true to our own convictions. What’s the solution? Some sermons advise—‘be more assertive; define your boundaries; you’re responsible for your own happiness.’ That may be good advice, but *it’s not the gospel*. The NT message is *not* to be an autonomous ‘Self-Pleaser,’ but to become a ‘God-Pleaser,’ serving Christ as Lord. We examine how to do that. Paul exemplifies God-pleasing and says ‘imitate me.’ He’s clear about his divine commitment; he resists peer-pressure from influential people. Paul was not arrogant, or egotistical; rather he values God’s approval over human acceptance or rejection. We should too!

### I. People-Pleasing in Today’s Society

A. Today there's intense pressure to please people at school, work, & via social media. Too often we're governed by others' approval or disapproval; we aren't true to our own convictions. What's the solution? Some Church-sermons offer advice such as:—

- o "Be more assertive; stop being a 'push-over'." "Define your boundaries and then enforce them."
- o "You're not responsible to keep everyone else happy; you're responsible for your own happiness."
- o "If someone is controlling you it's not their fault, it's yours!" These may (perhaps) be good advice, but they're *not the gospel!*

B. The Gospel—Good News, Not 'Good Advice'

- "There's an unbridgeable difference between moralistic good advice and biblical good *news* [the gospel]"—Jeff Hatton
- Tim. Keller says, "Advice is counsel about what you must do. News is a report about what's already been done...Advice says it's all up to you to act. News says someone else has acted. Advice urges you to make something happen. News urges you to recognize that something has happened & respond to it. [The Gospel is *good news*; it contrasts with good advice.]"—T. Keller

## II. Gal. 1:10 Various Translations

? "Am I now *trying to persuade people, or God? Or am I striving to please people?* If I were *still trying to please people*, I would not be a servant [slave] of Christ." (Gal. 1:10 CSB)

- "Both expressions [*trying to persuade people*' and *trying to please people*"] mean [essentially] the same thing & have the same connotation in this context. If Paul is not seeking to 'persuade human beings,' he must be seeking to 'persuade' God instead, or (which means the same thing) 'pleasing' him." [Martinus de Boer, *Galatians*, p. 63]

? "Am I now *trying to gain the approval of people, or of God? Or am I trying to please people?* If [contrary to fact] I were still trying to please people, I would not be *a slave of Christ!*" (Gal. 1:10 NET)

- "The questions—"Am I now persuading people, or God? Am I trying to please people?"—*anticipate a negative answer* as Paul distinguishes himself from [orators] who persuade others for their own benefit. [That's] incompatible with Paul's role as a slave of Christ...As [Christ's] slave [his] message is not his own...[he] speaks for God." [J. W. Thompson, *Apostle of Persuasion*, p. ]

## III. Key Statement or Throwaway Line?

A. Role of Gal. 1:10 – Various Assessments

- "It's...difficult to determine why Paul...included 1:10 in...Galatians...since v. 11...follows rather well on v. 9."—Martin de Boer
- "Gal. 1:10 is...often explained as '*an emotional outburst*' in [which] '*Paul speaks in fervor*'"—David Hester

- Connecting: “Paul’s words [cursing ‘distorted-gospel’ purveyors (Gal. 1-8-9)] seem harsh, but [Paul] uses them as proof that... *he is not a people-pleaser in any way whatsoever*; he is Christ’s [slave] (*doulos*) aiming to please him...[So] he will stand up to the circumcisers just as he stood up to the false brothers (Gl. 2:4-5) & to Peter (Gl. 2:11-15).” [Michael J Gorman, *Paul*, p. 240]
- Gal. 1:10 “should *not* be isolated *merely ‘as an emotional outburst’* ...[It’s] *an interpretive key.*” – Brian Dodd
- “Gal. 1:10 is *not a mere addendum to a rebuke, but a foundational element*...of Paul’s message.” –Debbie Hunn

## B. Mutually Exclusive Options – Please God or People (Gal. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:2-4)

?“We were bold [in] our God to speak the gospel of God to you in spite of great opposition...As we’ve been...entrusted with the gospel, so *we speak, not to please people, but rather God*, who examines our hearts.” (1 Thess. 2:2-4) Note: Paul says they “preached the gospel as those...committed to speaking in order *not to please their human audience but to please God.*” [ESV]

- “Paul poses *2 absolutely incompatible goals: pleasing man, or...God*. There’s no possibility of combining the two.” [ESV]
- Paul “sets up *two categories* in Gal. 1:10—that of...pleasing people & that of...pleasing God—that are both *mutually exclusive & all inclusive* in the sense that Paul will be doing one or the other.” [Debbie Hunn, “*Pleasing God...?*” *Biblica*, V. 91/1, p. 48]
- “In his question [Gal. 1:10 Paul] makes assumptions...—That in this context seeking to please God and seeking to please people are *mutually exclusive* [options]...If Paul seeks to please one, he does not seek to please the other [and vice versa].” [Debbie Hunn, “*Pleasing God or Pleasing People? Defending the Gospel in Gal. 1-2,*” *Biblica*, V. 91/1 (2010) p. 35]
- Paul’s “motive is to please only God. He was concerned about preserving truth, not increasing his approval ratings. To please people is to desert Christ. You must choose—serve people’s fickle pleasures or serve the faithful Christ.” [Max Anders, *Gal.*, p. ]
- “It was impossible in the mind of the apostle to be a people-pleaser & a God-pleaser at the same time. (Gal. 1:10). This *does not mean that one must be insensitive or offensive when dealing with people*...Paul attempted to...enhance [the gospel’s] appeal... But he was obligated to do so without altering the message entrusted to him.” [D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, p. ]

## C. Link between 1:10 & what follows

- “Am I now trying to gain the approval of people, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people I would not be a slave of Christ! 11 Now I want you to know, brothers & sisters that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. 12 For I did not receive it or learn it from any human source; instead I received it by a revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1:10-12 NET)
- In Gal. 1:10c “Paul connects a desire to curry [peoples’] favor with a lack of service to Christ. *‘If I were still trying to please people I would not be a slave of Christ’* (1:10c) and 1:11-12 describe a single aspect of serving Christ...[i.e.,] preaching the gospel God gave him...If Paul... commissioned by God to preach, sought to please God, he would preach the gospel of Christ. If he sought to please people, he would alter his gospel to suit them.” [Debbie Hunn, “*Pleasing God...?*” *Biblica*, V. 91/1 p. 35]
- Paul “sets up *2 categories* in Gal. 1:10—that of...pleasing people & that of...pleasing God—that are both *mutually exclusive & all inclusive* in the sense that Paul will be doing one or the other. Paul then defends his gospel on the basis of his life-motivation ... He preaches the gospel he received from God [which]...shows that he desires to please God. Using the dichotomy [of] Gal.

1:10 he demonstrates his desire to please God by arguing...he no longer vies for status among people by pleasing them [proved (for e.g.) by] his lack of contact with the apostles [Gal. 1:16b-17].” [Debbie Hunn, “*Pleasing God or...People?*” *Biblica*, V. 91/1, p. 48]

#### IV. Paul’s Fundamental Motivation—to ‘Please the Lord’ (2 Cor. 5:9-10; 1 Thess. 2:4)

? “*We make it our aim to be pleasing to [the Lord]* 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...” (2 Cor. 5:9-10)

? “*We’ve been...entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please people, but rather God, who examines our hearts*” (1 Th. 2:4)

? “*Am I...trying to gain the approval of people, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ!*” (Gal. 1:10 NET)

? *Charles Swindoll* (b. 1934) was set free from trying to be a ‘man-pleaser’ by this passage [Gal. 1:10] “There was a time in my ministry...when a single verse of Scripture jolted me...delivering me from the trap of telling a group of influential people what they wanted to hear...It was a turning point in my...pilgrimage from [being a] ‘slave to others’ to ‘servant of Christ.’ It reads, “For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10) [Charles R. Swindoll, *Start Where You Are*, p. ]

##### A. The Basic Divine-Human Dichotomy

- “One of Paul’s most significant...opposite[es] occurs 3 times prior to his narration of his past life...Gal. 1:13-...In Gal. 1:1, he states that his apostleship *is not from or through any human agency. Rather, its source is Christ & God.* The same opposition between human terms & Christ/God terms occurs in Gal.1:10 & 11-12. In...Gal. 1:10 *Paul...wants to please Christ, not humans. The use of eti (‘still’) in v. 10 suggests that Paul [had]...a human-pleasing desire [as]... part of his own past.* In vv. 11-12 Paul asserts that his gospel (like his apostleship...) is not a human gospel nor was it taught to him by any human. Rather it came by a revelation from Christ...[There’s] a pattern of opposition...3 times in [Gal. 1:1-12]. The *opposition of the divine & human terms* ...Paul ... introduced his narrative by stating simply & plainly, ‘I did not receive my apostleship or my gospel *from any human source, & I do not want to please any humans.* I received *my apostleship & gospel from God & Christ and [they] are the ones I want to please.* Every action & motive...is measured against *Paul’s basic statement*, & Paul relates to every person as friend or foe for that same reason.” [Paul D. Koptak, *Rhetorical Identification in Paul’s Autobiographical Narrative*,” JSNT, V. 40, p. ]

##### B. Paul’s self-identification—“Slave of Christ” (Gal. 1:10d; cf. Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1)

- Paul’s self-designation as a “‘*slave of Christ*’ (Gal. 1:10) primarily communicates Paul’s desire to please Christ... providing support for his insistence that he preaches a divine [gospel] rather than a human gospel, since *he has acted to please his master throughout his entire ministry.*” [Daniel M. I. Cole, *Isaiah’s Servant in Paul*, p. 244]
- “‘*Christ’s slave*’ is emphatic...We should understand it as ‘*Christ is my master & I am controlled by no one & nothing else*’...[In contrast to] those who are ‘enslaved’ to a traditional Jewish lifestyle. [Paul] portrays himself as compelled by the One who has called & commissioned him...Paul’s self-characterization as ‘Christ’s slave’ is clearly related to the argument that

follows. *His 'I' statement is paradigmatic.* He is an exemplary 'slave of Christ' whom the Galatians are to emulate...[This] is made explicit in Gal. 4:12... 'Become as I am.'" [Brian J. Dodd, *Paul's Paradigmatic 'I'* p. 150]

- "In the NT the...use of *doulos* ['slave,' is] not restricted to leaders of God's people...To be a 'slave of Christ' is not a right reserved for the favored few in the church, but is the privilege of all believers." [Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ*, pp. 133, 138]

### C. No longer pleasing People—"If I were *still* trying to please people..." (Gal. 1:10c)

- "Denying that he *still* pleases human beings (Gal. 1:10), Paul implies that he had previously done just that, in the 'former' life he is about to describe." [John M. G. Barclay, *Paul & the Gift*, p. 356]
- "In Gal. 1:14-19 Paul says that, in contrast to his earlier life, after his conversion he no longer sought to gain status among humans." [Debbie Hunn, "*Pleasing God or Pleasing People?*" *Biblica*, Vol. 91/1 (2010) p.]

## V. Paul's Autobiography shows he's Pleasing God, not People

- "If Gal. 1:10 is an interpretive marker, we would expect...*people-pleasing vs. God-pleasing* to be exemplified in the auto-biographical passage (Gal. 1:11-2:21)...We are not disappointed." [Brian J. Dodd, *Paul's Paradigmatic 'I'*, pp. 150-1]
- "The function of Paul's self-defense in Gal. 1:13-2:1 is to substantiate...his gospel message...by forming an ultimate dichotomy between 2 groups of people: *those who seek to please people* [vs. pleasing God] (Gal. 1:10)... 'Paul sets up 2 categories in Gal. 1:10—that of seeking to please people & seeking to please God—that are mutually exclusive & all inclusive in the sense that Paul will be doing one or the other. Paul then defends his gospel on the basis of *his life-motivation*. To show that he preaches the gospel he received from God, it suffices for Paul to show that he desires to please God.' (Debbie Hunn, "*Pleasing God or Pleasing People?*" *Biblica*, V. 91/1 (2010) p. 48)" [Kipp Davis "*Paul*," in H. Najman (ed.) *Jeremiah's Scriptures*, p. 568]
- The antithesis between pleasing God & pleasing humans in Gal. 1:10...[is] dramatized by Paul in his autobiographical narrative...For the Galatians to please God, they must continue in a relationship of identification with Paul...& not enter a new relationship with those who tell them to be circumcised. To choose circumcision is to please human authority; indeed, it is to become enslaved." [Paul D. Koptak, *Rhetorical Identification in Paul's Autobiographical Narrative*," *JSNT*, V. 40 (1990), p.]

### A. Paul converted; he has a new center & focus (Gal. 1:12-17)

- "Paul's...life has an *entirely new focus* [after conversion, which] becomes the *new organizing center of Paul's existence* that drives him to preach God's Son to the Gentiles. *He is answerable now* not to his ancestors [Gal. 1:14] or his contemporaries & compatriots, *but to God (or Christ) alone*; hence *a wedge is driven between 'pleasing human beings'* & fulfilling his duties as *'the slave of Christ'* (Gal. 1:10)...The thread of...continuity in Gal. 1-2 is not Paul as such...but Paul's story." [John Barclay, "*Paul's Story: Theology as Testimony*," in Bruce W. Longenecker (ed.) *Narrative Dynamics in Paul*, p. 141]
- When he was converted, "*Paul was done with human-pleasing*. He was done with preaching only what looked good to...people around him. He was even done preaching only to those who fit the agenda of his [Jewish-] Christian brothers & sisters. So Paul did an unexpected thing: he preached to the Gentiles. He even stopped asking what others expected. Rather than

consulting with the apostles, he went straight to Arabia to seek a word directly from God (Gal. 1:15- 17). When he did get together with Peter & James, it was not for long & it was not to seek their approval for what he had been sent to do. No, Paul knew that God had sent him directly to the Gentiles & (while it would not make sense to the people around him) Paul knew that he had to obey.” [Emily R. Prevost, “*Serving God, Not Men or Women*,” Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, TX., p. 70]

#### B. Paul called & commissioned; he didn’t directly consult the Apostles (Gal. 1:13-24)

- “As for the apostles, he neither competed with them nor inquired of them...but rather ignored them.”—Paul Koptak
- “The distance Paul kept from the apostles...illustrates that he did not seek to mingle with them with an eye to prominence among them, & this answers his question in Gal. 1:10: ‘Do I now seek to please people or God?’ *Paul argues for the divine origin of his gospel on the basis that he has sought to please God, not human beings, after his conversion.*” [Debbie Hunn, “*Pleasing God or Pleasing People? Defending the Gospel in Gal. 1-2*,” *Biblica*, Vol. 91/1 (2010) p.]
- “In Gal. 1:14-19 Paul says that...after his conversion he no longer sought to gain status among humans: Paul’s brief association with the Jerusalem apostles – of whom he met only two – is evidence that he did not ingratiate himself with them or seek to rise through their ranks.” [Debbie Hunn, “*Pleasing God or Pleasing People?*” *Biblica*, Vol. 91/1 (2010) p.]
- “A straight-forward reading...of Gal. 1:15-20 is that Paul is providing an oath to emphasize that even at this *first opportunity to please people in Jerusalem, he did not do so.*” [Justin K. Hardin, “*Gal. 1-2 Without a Mirror*,” *Tyndale Bull.*, V. 65.2, p. 289]

#### C. Resisting the ‘enslaving false brothers’ in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:1-10)

- “Paul spends a lot of time recounting his own biography...providing a self-portrait that should serve paradigmatically for the Galatians to imitate (Gal. 1:10-2:14; cf. 4:12 [*‘I beg you, brothers & sisters: Become as I am...I’ve become as you are.’*]). Paul is not interested purely in ‘setting the record straight’ or...giving an authorized account of his life-story. His gospel is at stake, his congregations are being ‘troubled’...*Paul proves that he is not a ‘man-pleaser’...in his recollection of the Jerusalem Council & the incident at Antioch.*” [Michael F. Bird & John A. Dunne, “*Pastoring with a Big Stick*,” in B. Rosner (ed.) *Paul as Pastor*, p. ]
- In Jerusalem some “‘pseudo-brothers’ smuggled in to...enslave...Paul & Titus...Their desire to enslave is contrasted with...Paul’s self-depiction as ‘enslaved to Christ’ in Gal. 1:10. This anticipates [Paul’s] confrontation with his Jerusalem opponents in Gal. 2:4-5...[Here] Paul...demonstrate[s] he is Christ’s...slave & not a people-pleaser...Paul stands up to them, ‘We did not...submit to these people for even a moment, so...the truth of the gospel would be preserved for you’ (Gal. 2:5)...Paul wants the Galatians to show the same boldness toward the intruders in Galatia.” [Brian J. Dodd, *Paul’s Paradigmatic ‘I’*, p. 151]
- Note “the...term ‘*bring into bondage*’ or ‘*enslave*’ [Gal. 2:4]...In the immediate context of Gal. 2, the term is set in contrast with ‘freedom in Christ’. In the larger context...it is also *set in contrast with Paul’s servant-bondage to Christ in Gal. 1.10*...Paul knew that he could only submit to one authority. If he submitted to the false brothers he would betray his loyalty to Christ... The false brothers stand in relation to Paul as did his old life; they are both rejected as ‘still pleasing humans’ (1.10).” [Paul D. Koptak, *Rhetorical Identification in Paul’s Autobiographical Narrative*, *JSNT*, V. 40 (1990), p. ]

#### D. Opposing Peter & Co. at Antioch (Gal. 2:11-21)

- “Gal. 1:10 [is] an interpretive key that unlocks...Gal. 2:4-6, 11-21...The opening of Galatians makes two assertions...developed in the autobiographical section [1.] [Paul’s] gospel is from

God & nor from human origin...[2.] *Paul does not seek to please people but God & Christ.* This [2.] explains the recounting of Paul's confrontation with Peter at Antioch as a model for the Galatians to stand up to...the heterodox teachers lest they be 'enslaved' by them. Paul's underlying purpose is to claim their total allegiance to the gospel of Christ that he has proclaimed." [Brian J. Dodd, *Paul's Paradigmatic 'I' ...*, p. 155]

- "In Gal. 2:18-21...Paul completes his self-presentation of how to be Christ's slave in confronting a 'people-pleaser'...He stands his ground against Peter & 'those of the circumcision' (2:12) in Antioch & rebukes them." [B. Dodd, *Paul's Paradigmatic 'I'*, p. 155]
- Paul "makes...people-pleasing one of the main issues of his multi-pronged argument...By this pithy 'I' statement [Gal. 1:10], he sets a clear example for them to stay true to their Lord & Master & reject...[agitators'] pressure & opinion...Gal. 1:10... explains why Paul...recounts his public confrontation with Peter (Gal. 2:11-15). He is modeling how to stand firm against the pressure of influential people. Peter shamefully caved in to people pressure." [Brian J. Dodd, *Empowered Church Leadership*, pp. 54-5]
- "With his conversion Paul becomes a *doulos* ['slave'] of Christ...The effect [is seen in] the crisis in Antioch (Gal. 2:11-14). Paul's adherence to...Gal. 1:10... & Peter's violation of it, are equally in evidence...Peter withdraws from table-fellowship with...Gentiles ...because he feared the circumcision party. As fellow Jewish Christians [from] the Jerusalem church...they wielded a [greater] influence upon Peter which (in Jewish eyes) lesser [Gentile] Christians from a lesser church [Antioch] could hardly equal...He feared them because their favor...was vital...for his theological & social security. Thus [Peter] allowed them to dictate his actions &...override his personal convictions. Paul in response 'opposed Peter to his face' (Gal. 2:11)...demonstrating... his freedom from the fear that still bound Peter...[Here] Paul challenged the most eminent... apostle [&] the authority of the Jerusalem church. [Paul] takes his stand...because the 'truth of the gospel' demands it & [his] *slavery to Christ leaves no room for the fear of man* (Gal. 1:10)... We might, of course, interpret Paul's boldness in Antioch very differently: he asserts his colossal ego in the face of threats to 'his turf,' his message, & apostolic claims...This view however fails to account for the decisive effect of Paul's theology on his conduct. *Paul is in fact, not just in theory, a slave of Christ...* For Paul the *doulos* ['slave'], what Jesus the *Kyrios* ['Lord'] says about him is vastly more important than what he says about himself...The judgment of Christ matters far more than that of other people" [J. Knox Chamblin, *Paul & the Self: Apostolic Teaching for Personal Wholeness*, pp. 136-137]

## VI. Who are the People-Pleasers? The Galatians? The 'Agitators'?

- "In Gal. 1:10, Paul was not responding to any charges...Rather Paul was offering himself as a foil for *the agitators, who were guilty of being people-pleasers*...This is where Paul ends his climactic closing (Gal. 6:12-13, cf. 5:11). Paul was not on the defense; he was on the attack... Paul's aim was...to persuade the Galatians...they should not follow the agitators. Instead they should become like Paul." [Justin K. Hardin, "*Gal. 1-2 Without a Mirror*," Tyndale Bulletin, V. 65.2 (2014) p. 299]
- In Gal. 4-6 "Paul presents himself as a foil to the agitators so...Paul's integrity was meant to shine in sharp relief to the *people-pleasing motives of the agitators*. This...serve[d]...to win the Galatian churches back to his gospel." [Justin Hardin, "*Gal. 1-2 Without a Mirror*," Tyndale Bull., V. 65.2 (2014) p. 298]
- "'Am I...trying to please people, or God? (Gal. 1:10) Why does [Paul] ask this question? ...Paul knows that the crisis in Galatia is not simply a theological crisis but a moral one. The Galatians aren't simply confused; *they're being people-pleasers*, rather than servants of Christ...Paul

wants to say...is: *people-pleasers don't make good servants of Christ.*" [T. Wilson, *Gal.*, pp. 35-6]

- "Beverley Gaventa says *Gal. 1:10 implies the Galatians desire is to please people & that Paul is an example of not doing so.*" [Beverley R. Gaventa, "*Gal. 1 & 2: Autobiography as Paradigm,*" *NovT.*, Vol. 26 (1986), pp. 312-314]

## VII. Paul as Paradigm—an Example for us to Emulate (Gal. 4:12)

o "I beg you, brothers and sisters: *Become as I am*, for I also have become as you are." (Gal. 4:12)

### A. Paul as a Model (Gal. 4:12)

- Some "interpreters...argue that Paul presents his actions & responses as a model for imitation. The qualities Paul wants the Galatians to emulate are variously described: loyalty to the gospel...*seeking to please God rather than people* [etc.] ...This ... general perspective [is]... increasingly popular." [T. Wiarda, "*Plot & Character in Gal. 1-2,*" *Tyndale Bull.*, V. 55.2, pp. 233-4]

### B. Our Response—*are you trying to Please People or God?*

- Our "pleasing people is not God's ultimate desire. The Bible says...if you try to please [people] we're not servants of Christ. (Gal. 1:10)...Servants of Christ would do anything to please Christ. When we are trying to please people, our focus shifts away from God. Think about it...when we die & stand before God, are all the people we 'pleased' going to matter? No! When we stand before God...all that...matter[s] is how we served him & if we surrendered our lives to Him... Most of us...'people pleasers' ... don't realize that all of the work [involved] is...taking you away from the One...you should be trying to please. I'm not saying you should make people angry, but I am saying...your purpose is not to please people; it's to please & bring glory to God. So... ask yourself '*Whom am I trying to please—God or people?*'" [Rebekah Howell, *Daily Devotional Bible for Women*, p. 1523]
- Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (1475–1530) once remarked, '*If I had served God as faithfully as [I served] man, I [would have] been better rewarded, and not forsaken in my distress.*' [His 'distress' came when he fell from the fickle favor of King Henry VIII.]

### C. Three Kinds of People

1. "I suggest there are three kinds of people...First there are the Self-Pleasers. These are the self-centered, self-seeking people. They continually ask: *How will this affect me? How can I benefit from this situation? What's in it for me?*...The whole world [seems] to revolve around their wants & needs." [Michael Youssef, *Leading the Way through Galatians*, pp. 34-35]

2. Second, there are the People-Pleasers. In their own way [they] are as self-seeking as the Self-Pleasers. They are still thinking of themselves...but their main focus is on being accepted & avoiding rejection by others. They...worry what other people think of them...They want people to notice them & praise them. [Or they seek to avoid others' disapproval.] Constantly striving to please others is exhausting..." [Michael Youssef, *Leading the Way through Galatians*, pp. 34-35]

3. "Third, there are the God-Pleasers. They have stopped trying to please themselves. They have stopped trying to please others. They have devoted themselves to pleasing the Lord. That's the primary motive for everything they do. The foremost question of the God-Pleasers is: *What is the will*



*of God? Is the thing I'm about to do or say acceptable to him? If I say or do this thing will God be glorified?* [Michael Youssef, *Leading the Way through Galatians*, pp. 34-35]

4. "The question we must ask ourselves is: Where am I on this list? Am I a Self-Pleaser, a People-Pleaser, or a God-Pleaser? The apostle Paul knew where he stood. He knew which category he had chosen. So he wrote: 'Am I now trying to persuade people, or God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a [slave] of Christ' (Gal. 1:10)." [Michael Youssef, *Leading the Way through Galatians*, pp. 34-35]

5. "Paul wants us to know there is hope for the Self-Pleaser & the People-Pleaser. We don't have to live our lives vainly focused on ourselves. We don't have to remain mired in the swamp of self-centeredness. We don't have to spend all our energies striving after the approval of others. By the grace of God, we can experience the peace & joy [of] becoming a God-Pleaser." [Michael Youssef, *Leading the Way through Galatians*, pp. 34-35]

#### D. People-Pleaser OR Christ's Servant/Slave?

- "People-pleaser of servant of Christ? Which are we? People-pleasers have an inordinate desire to please other people; servants of Christ have an all-consuming passion to please God. People-pleasers are motivated by the fear of man; servants of Christ are inspired by the fear of God...People-pleasers are anxious for the approval of others & distraught when they don't get it; servants of Christ simply serve others & leave approval or disapproval to the judgment of God." [Todd A. Wilson, *Galatians*, p. 35]
- Fear of Others' Disapproval—"Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but trusting the Lord means safety." (Prov. 29:25 NLT)
- "People-pleasers cave under pressure from influential people...Paul understood the pressure of influential people, how they tempt us to compromise our gospel-rooted principles. [The incident at Jerusalem re: Titus (Gal. 2:1-11)] ...People-pleasers yield to pressure. But servants of Christ like Paul stand their ground... 'We did not give up & submit to these people for even a moment, so that the truth of the gospel would be preserved for you' (Gal. 2:5)." [Todd A. Wilson, *Galatians*, p. 36]
- "People-pleasers ignore Harmful Hypocrisy...I imagine that the apostle Paul was at least tempted to ignore the harmful hypocrisy he saw developing in Antioch (Gal. 2:11-14)...Every last one of [the Jewish Christians] was led astray by Peter's one act of hypocrisy. That's harmful hypocrisy...Every last one of them was led astray except...the apostle Paul...Instead he called Peter on it." [Todd A. Wilson, *Galatians*, p. 37]
- "People-pleasers hide from the shame of the cross." Jesus, the crucified, his cross, etc. is associated with shame, humiliation. Are we willing to share his cross with its shame, humiliation? Gal. 6:14; 2:20, etc.

#### E. Fighting the People-Pleaser within You

- "There is a people-pleaser in all of us, one that needs a continual crucifixion if we are going to become the servants of Christ that God wants us to be. But how do we fight &...kill the people-pleaser in our own hearts?...By fighting the fight of faith, by trusting in all that God is for us in Christ. So if we're going to gain victory in our battle against people-pleasing, we must embrace the fact, first of all, that *Jesus Christ has taken all the judgments against us and nailed them to his cross*...He nailed it all to the cross. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). [Todd A. Wilson, *Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living*, pp. 40-41]
- But if we're going to fight the temptation to people-please, we must also come to really believe that *God's judgment is the only one that counts*. In fact, in light of God's judgment of us, every other judgment ought to be small, even...nonexistent. "But with me it is a very small thing [to] be

judged by you or by any human court,” Paul tells the Corinthians. “In fact, I do not even judge myself...I’m not aware of anything against myself, but I’m not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me” (1 Cor. 4:3-4). [Todd A. Wilson, *Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living*, (2013) p. 41]

- So we must not entrust ourselves to the judgment of others but to [God’s] judgment...People are fickle, & so are their judgment of us. If we’re always working hard to curry favor from other people & to do what they think we should do, we will eventually work ourselves into a state of exhaustion & despair. Remember, God’s judgment is far kinder than man’s, & God’s judgment is also far simpler than man’s. It doesn’t involve a thousand different & competing expectations of us; God only wants one thing from us: “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6)—faith in his Son Jesus Christ & love for God & for others born of the Holy Spirit. At the end of the day this is the only thing that counts before God; this is the only thing that will avail at God’s judgment (Gal. 5:5). [Todd A. Wilson, *Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living*, (2013) p. 41]

**F. Conclusion** People-pleasers don’t make good servants of Christ because people-pleasers cave under pressure from influential people, ignore harmful hypocrisy, & run from the shame of the cross. But more than that, people-pleasers live anxious lives, always worrying about whether they’ll find approval or disapproval from others; & in so doing they’ll miss the approval that can come only from God himself. [Todd A. Wilson, *Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living*, (2013) p. 41]

- *Jerry Bridges* (1929-2016) “Soon after the death of my first wife [1988 Jerry was ~60] God brought into my life another godly lady—a single woman who’d been a family friend for many years. As our friendship deepened into a romantic relationship, I became concerned about what people would think. I knew I’d be violating the culturally-accepted maxim: ‘don’t make major decisions the 1st year.’ I also sensed an inner compulsion in my spirit, which I felt was from God, to move ahead. My journal ...records numerous times...I struggled with God over this issue. One day I wrote, ‘I wonder if God is pushing me along faster in this relationship than I want to go because of fear of what people will think.’ I’d put God in the box of our culturally-accepted norm. Surely He wouldn’t do anything in my life that’s unacceptable to my friends. God was actually doing a wonderful thing, but instead of fully enjoying His work of grace, I was struggling with Him because of what people might think. [He married again in 1989] *If you’re going to experience the joy of your freedom in Christ, you have to decide whether you’ll please God or people.* [Jerry Bridges, *Holiness Day by Day: Transformational Thoughts for Your Spiritual Journey*, p. ]
- Let’s free other believers from the pressure of our expectations! They aren’t obligated to please us! We’re all ‘Christ’s slaves.’

## VIII. Traits of God-Pleasers

1. God-Pleasers realize they must (first) be Christian-believers (Rom. 8:8-9)

- “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you.” (Rom. 8:8-9)

2. God-Pleasers study Scripture to understand what pleases God—“Try to discern what’s pleasing to the Lord.” (Eph. 5:10)

3. They are conscious, in everything, of pleasing the Lord—“Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things” (Col. 3:2)

4. God-Pleasers are more concerned with what God sees in their hearts than what people see in their appearance (1 Sam. 16:17)
  - “The LORD sees not as humans see: humans look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” (1 Sam. 16:17)
5. God-Pleasers program their conscience by the Bible, rather than by culture (Rom. 12:2)
  - “Don’t be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” (Rom. 12:2)
6. God-Pleasers do not shy away from necessary conflict or confrontation (e.g. Gal. 2:11)
7. God-Pleasers don’t worry or fret when they displease people *if, by so doing*, they please God (2 Cor. 5:9)
  - “We make it our aim to be pleasing to [the Lord]” (2 Cor. 5:9) [Based on Lou Priolo, *Pleasing People*, pp. 127-146]

## IX. Are we a ‘People-Pleasing Church’ or a ‘God-Pleasing Church?’

### A. People-Pleasing Churches?

- In North America we find “the secular, individualistic, consumer-oriented, therapeutic-style, business-imitating, market-driven, building-dominated church of the West...The ‘attractional church’...tends to think of people as consumers, reinforcing the pervasive practice of church shopping & turning pastors into commodities paid to provide the religious goods, services, & experiences that congregants can consume.” [Rick Richardson, “*Emerging Missional Movements*,” IBMR, V. 37.3 (2013) p. 131]
- “*Church Growth* practitioners focused on *what humans do* in missions rather than on *what God is doing*. They saw the missional task as setting goals, developing appropriate methodologies, & evaluating what does or does not work rather than seeking God’s will based upon biblical & theological reflection. Their thinking segmented the gospel & practice, the human & divine into two compartmentalized worlds, & practice was developed on the basis of ‘what works’ rather than the will & essence of God. Christian leaders placed more emphasis on developing effective strategy than forming communities shaped in the image of God. Although they advocated faithfulness to God, the system they proposed was based on human intelligence & ingenuity... Church Growth begins with the question ‘Why do some churches grow & others do not?’” [Gailyn Van Rhee, “*Contrasting Missional & Church Growth Perspectives*,” Monthly Missiological Reflection #34]
- “The Church Growth model is inadequate. By beginning with anthropology [What do people want/need?] rather than theology & segmenting theology & practice, Church Growth advocates assume that their model reflects the nature of God. In other words, church growth determines effective practice & then seeks to validate this practice by the use of Scripture. The movement emphasizes growth rather than faithful proclamation of the gospel & faithful living of the gospel.” [Gailyn Van Rhee, “*Contrasting Missional & Church Growth Perspectives*,” Monthly Missiological Reflection #34]
- Church-growth Movement—*Size equals Success*—Size (or growth in size) is taken as indicator of God’s blessing/approval

B. God-Pleasing Churches'—Join God in His Mission [see CIT's messages on 'The Mission of God' (Ephesians) 2020-21]

## Questions

1. Today's society probably places more pressure on us to be "people-pleasers," at school, work & via social media, than experienced by previous decades. In what ways do you sense this pressure in various areas of your life? Discuss.

2. Have someone search the Internet for (ask Siri for) "*How to Stop being a People-Pleaser.*" What are typical examples of advice? How does this compare with Paul's presentation in Galatians 1:10; for Paul, what counteracts being a "People pleaser"?

3. Study Bibles say that, in Gal. 1:10, "Paul poses 2 *absolutely incompatible goals: pleasing man, or...God.* There's no possibility of combining the two."

a. In the context of the issues facing Gentile Christians in Galatia, what does "pleasing people" vs. "pleasing God" mean?

b. Do you think that today, in 21st century Canada, it's possible to please both people & God? (Why or why not?)

c. Besides the 2 options mentioned, is there a 3rd option—e.g. 'Self-Pleasing'? How do you think Paul would respond to this 'overlooked' 3rd option? (Discuss)

4. Read 2 Cor. 5:9-10. Related to this, Rebekah Howell writes: "Think about it...when we die & stand before God, are all the people we 'pleased' going to matter? No! When we stand before God...all that...matter[s] is how we served him & if we surrendered our lives to Him." How does this perspective help us evaluate being a "people-pleaser" vs. a "God-pleaser?" (Discuss)

5. Consider the 7 points enumerated under VII. "*Traits of God-Pleasers.*" Which one (or ones) do you feel the Lord wants you to apply in your life? How do you intend to implement it? (Discuss)