

Pleasing God

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

November 1, 2020

Paul the Apostle was the first Christian missionary to Gentiles and as you know, thanks to his tireless passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we have been blessed to know and follow Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, making disciples of Jesus Christ in this world.

During his mission works in the 1st century, Paul had to face an on-going resistance and hardship. There was a group of people known as the Judaizers who wanted to keep the good news of Jesus Christ as a Jewish movement.

Paul believed the Gospel of Jesus Christ for all the people and was determined to reach out to the Gentiles. Therefore, these Judaizers looked for every opportunity to keep him from reaching out to Gentiles, finding fault with him.

They accused him of being in the ministry just for the money, which is not true. They also accused him of spreading lies and untruths, which is not true either.

So Paul was forced to defend himself. He writes to Christians in Thessalonica, beginning with verse 5: “You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed. God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else . . .”

Then what was Paul looking for? The answer lies in the second half of verse 4: “We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.” St. Paul had no interest in pleasing people. St. Paul lived to please God.

Not pleasing people, but God. It is the foremost highest interest we Christians are to have, if our primary goal is to have God say at the end of our life, “Well done, you, good and faithful servant.

Now, how do we live to please God? We can find answers to this question in the words and acts of Paul the Apostle.

1

First of all, to please God, live with integrity. That’s what St. Paul did.

He says to the church at Thessalonica, "For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel . . . You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed. God is our witness."

Paul lived a life of integrity. Living a life of integrity is more than simply keeping the commandments. Many people have never killed, never stolen, never committed adultery. That doesn't mean they live a life of integrity. Keeping the commandments is an outward act. Living a life of integrity comes from within.

A story of a writer for a newspaper in Toronto, Canada. He undertook an investigation into the ethical practices of auto repair shops in his town.

He took a spark-plug wire off of his engine, making the car run unevenly. He took the car in to different shops and asked them to fix it. Time after time people sold him unnecessary repairs or charged him for repairs that were not done.

Finally, he went to a small garage.

A fellow named Fred came out, popped open the hood, and said, "Let me listen to that thing." After a few seconds, he told the reporter, "I think I know what's wrong." He reached down and grabbed the wire, announcing, "Your spark-plug wire came off." And he put it back on.

The reporter asked, "What do I owe you?" "I'm not gonna charge you anything," Fred replied. "I didn't have to fix anything; I just reattached the wire."

The writer then told Fred what he was doing and that he had been charged all kinds of money by mechanics looking at that same wire. He asked Fred, "Why didn't you charge me anything?"

Fred said, "Are you sure you want to know? I happen to be a Christian and believe that everything we do should be done to glorify God. I'm not a preacher and I'm not a missionary, but I am a mechanic and so I do it honestly. I do it skillfully and I do it to the glory of God."

The next day in the newspaper was a headline that read, "Christian Mechanic, Honest to the Glory of God."

Integrity is honesty. It is an uncompromising commitment to be truthful and trustworthy. Integrity is authenticity.

Live a life of integrity. That is hard to do in a world like ours. Yes, a life of integrity will not make you popular, but God will be applauding over your life of integrity.

2

The second answer to the question, “How can we do to please God?” is this: live a life of love.

St. Paul writes, “We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. Even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.”

The reason Paul had such impact on the churches he served was that the people knew he genuinely cared about them.

Jesus cared, as well. He came to the world because he cared about the world and all the creation in it. He visited people alienated, ostracized and unjustly treated because he care about them. He met and healed the sick and opened the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf and set free those in bondage of sins and guilts. Why? Because he cared about them. Jesus died on the cross because he cared. Jesus was raised by the power of God from the dead because he cared about us. We, disciples of Jesus Christ are to imitate his caring ministry as we do follow him. This is a way of life to please God.

As has been often said, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. St. Paul cared. Jesus cared and still cares.

Do we care? How much do we care?

Do we care about our family members and friends? Neighbors? Do we care about one another at Fairfield Grace? Do we care about people in need? Do we care about people in poverty? Do we care about immigrants without documents? Do we care about refugees? Do we care about all lives, including Black Lives?

Since September, we have been reading “Just Mercy” by Bryan Stevenson independently and tomorrow evening will watch the movie, “Just Mercy” at 7 pm. Bryan Stevenson is the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, “a legal practice dedicated to defending the poor, the wrongly condemned and those trapped in the furthest reaches of our criminal justice system.”

Bryan Stevenson reminds us at the last chapter of the book that “when the woman accused of adultery was brought to Jesus, he told the accusers who wanted to stone her to death, “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.”” The woman’s accusers retreated and Jesus forgave her and urged her to sin no more. But today our self-righteousness, our fear, and our anger have caused even the Christians to hurl stones at the people who fall down, even when we know we should forgive or show compassion. He continues to write, “We cannot simply watch that happen. We have to be stone-catchers.” Mr. Stevenson is a caring person, playing as a stone-catcher. How about us?

3

One winter night, a man walked down the street to find a homeless girl shivering in the cold night. He was angry at God, shouting, “God, do something. Look at this poor girl. Why do you let her suffering miserably? “Why does she suffer?” “Why? Why?” After a short pause was, there was a voice of God from the cloud, saying, “That is why I have sent you.”

We are sent by God to care for one another and care for others. A life of love is a way to live a life pleasing God.

This is my morning prayer with you. “Lord, we want to live a life of integrity and love pleasing to you. Make your face shine upon us and let us keep our light shine anywhere and anytime.”

Knowing God is applauding over us, keep your light Shine, Fairfield Grace!

In the name of God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, Amen. Amen.