

Pleasing God

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This passage gives us a picture of what it means to please God: *you're open with your beliefs, pure in your motives, authentic in your life.*

Open Beliefs

Sociologists point out that when the majority of people in a society begin to think in a particular way, that way of thinking becomes normal. Those who don't adopt the majority's way of thinking are considered a *cognitive minority*. As a result, it's very difficult for them to survive. Take an anthropologist, whose goal is to understand and record a culture. When they enter a culture they can adopt it's clothing, language, food, but if they, as Peter Berger says, "go native" and accept that culture's beliefs they drop out of anthropology. They are *discredited*. Similarly Christians can adopt all sorts of cultural forms *except* major cognitive differences. To remain Christian you must maintain belief in Jesus divinity, faith in his resurrection. But when a Christian adopts secular beliefs, changes doctrines, their credibility is undermined. When they go native they drop out of the cognitive, spiritual minority. And the pressure to do this is quite intense, so much that many protestant Christians have surrendered their minority status in exchange for broad social acceptance. So when Paul says, "[But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi...we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict](#)," *he refuses to go native!* He maintains cognitive minority status. He uses a word to demonstrates it. "[Boldness to declare](#)" comes from a Greek word means "to express one's self freely," to be open about your beliefs. That's why its bold; its out in the open. Our society celebrates freedom of expression with majority beliefs but always with minority beliefs. This creates friction, and when Paul spoke freely, it was "*in the midst of much conflict*." The word for conflict is frequently used to refer to a *contest* (agoni), to agonize in athletic competition. The Greeks were known for their gymnasiums in which men would compete to overcome great contests of strength and agility. In what contests do you rise to the challenge? *Whole 30 diet, half-marathon? What do you exert considerable effort to overcome? A 60 minute workout, three times a week? A work competition? A social issue?* These are contests for the body, the mind, but what about the soul?! Paul says in verse 8 he shared not only the gospel of God but his very own *soul* (word is soul). What was in his soul? *The gospel of God*, repeated three times in nine verses. Why should you contend to be open about your belief in the gospel of God? Or if you don't believe it, why should you? When Paul was teaching in Thessalonica, we're told he [reasoned from the Scriptures explaining and proving it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead, and that Jesus is the Christ](#) (Act 17:2). Several things. First, he *reasoned*. He didn't ask them to close their eyes and wish it was true. He proved it through reason. It is quite reasonable to think if something is broken, it must be fixed to be whole. If you borrow my phone, and drop it, I got to have it fixed before it works properly. And for that to happen, someone has to pay for the repair. One of us has to *suffer* the cost. The gospel says everyone is sinfully broken, at times quite flagrantly, and in order to become whole someone has to suffer the cost. Jesus does just that, absorbs the cost for our sinful brokenness, in his death. Now the payment can come out of your pocket, but that means suffering God's wrath. So despite

Christians who say “just have faith,” the gospel of God is rational. *However, it's not just rational.* Why else would someone *put faith* in it? If it was just rational, you'd put your intellect in it. You put *faith* in someone, not just because they're reasonable, but because they're *desirable, trustworthy*. 18 years ago when I said, I Do, it made sense that we were compatible but that's not what got me to the altar. What got me there was something desirable in her. She was so affecting I wanted to invite her into my world and make a new one with her. **The gospel is more than reasonable; it's desirable, world-altering.** Here's how. Jesus *rose* from the dead. He broke sin and death. Isn't this what we're agonizing to overcome? Aging, illness, injustice? In the resurrection, Jesus's body is rehabilitated; decay is arrested and reversed; death put on notice, and something new, something glorious, something never-dying again takes its place. The resurrection, Paul argues elsewhere, is a picture of us in Christ (now/not fully)—a rehabilitated, reenergized, transformed. Beyond reasonable. Desirable! Thrilling, captivating, that faith in Jesus brings me this hope, not just this hope, this God! That's why you should believe the gospel, why you should be *bold* about your beliefs; they're life and world-altering! How can we keep it back from people? When you're open, authentic in your beliefs, this pleases God. *You're being who you really are.*

Pure Motives

In verses 3-6, Paul explains his motives for all this: “**For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive** (2:3). He's saying I'm not motivated by *self-interest*. It was quite common for false philosophers, traveling rhetoricians, to teach to gain a following and line their pockets. Verse 5 he says we never came to you with flattery nor with a pretext for greed. The word flattery doesn't mean to heap on the praise; it means to tailor your message to popular opinion, misrepresent to gain acceptance. It's backing off of Christ and his teachings, adopting a few secular viewpoints, and retreating to the cognitive majority. *Are you tailoring the gospel message? Do you leave out sin, judgment and wrath? Talk more about justice, culture-making? When is the last time you lovingly called someone out on their sin? Is your fight club fighting for faith in the gospel or do you just pool your complaints and sorrows? Share just enough to feel relief but not experience redemption? Has your faith become flat, disappeared into the cognitive majority?* I knew a Christian in college who was very evangelistic. He convened worldview panels, frequently shared the gospel, and debated philosophies. I admired him. Later on, he converted to Catholicism and got deep into politics, and eventually into some questionable business practices. He tailored his message to be accepted by others. *This can happen to anybody.* Tailoring your message is the opposite of being open with your beliefs. It's being, well, dishonest consumed with self-interest. What's the solution? Verse 4: **but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.** How does Paul avoid self interest, dropping out of the faith, being discredited? by making his life-aim *to please God*. What we want to please *most*, ends up shaping our lives, trumping other influences. When a soldier is fixed on pleasing his superior, he doesn't get entangled with civilian affairs. What matters most is staying true to his orders. When a child wants to please her parent most, she obeys. We have a teenager who strives to please us. It's exceptional. We ask him to do the dishes, take out the trash, watch the kids and he does it, with almost no complaint, Sure Dad! It's an attractive quality. Now I know what your thinking. That wont last forever...but it's lasting long enough for this illustration! *Right*

now, he's focused on pleasing us and that puts his desires for Xbox in check. His single-minded aim cuts through self interest to please his parents. But is he really doing it to get our acceptance? I don't think so. As a 13 year old, he comes to us for hugs several times a day. Why? He's secure in our love, sure of our approval. *He knows unequivocally loved, approved. When we live to please God, we do it not for approval but from approval.* We do it because God *matters most*. What matters most to you? Yourself? Others? God? Paul says, I've been approved by God. The word means tested and approved, uniquely as an apostle yes, *but also* as a child of God. He was tested for his sinful brokenness, and passed the test! How? Because Jesus suffered the price of sin, broke death, and gave him resurrection life—just like you and me. Who wouldn't want to please *that God*?

Truly Authentic

We please God by being open with our beliefs, pure in our motives, and finally truly authentic: *So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us* (8). To be authentic, they didn't just share a set of ideas. The gospel compelled them to share their lives, their souls, the deepest part of themselves. He lived with them, worked so as to not burden them financially, ate and prayed with them. *If you're truly authentic, the real deal, then you'll share your life and the gospel.* And to do this you have to get close enough to people to become affectionate for them, spend enough time with them that you get over your issues and love them. Be close enough to know how to pray for them, to laugh with them, to weep with them. But if you're set on pleasing yourself, or others, you won't do this. You can't. You have to use them to "feel connected" not alone. And that's a far cry from sharing your soul. We try to foster this true authenticity in our City Groups. Maybe you need to recommit or join one. Not just join, share, your life. Don't just sit on Sundays; connect throughout the week. Paul had credibility with this church because he shared, not just the gospel but his very own life. I'm proud to say you have elders, staff, and leaders who do this, week in and week out. They write their faith into your life because they what they believe. What do they believe? Jesus. Jesus didn't throw a Bible down from heaven, or write a message in the sky. He inscribed his message in the flesh; shared his life and breath, body and blood, to make a resurrected, approved, God-pleasing life possible. This Jesus is inviting you to bring your sins and your sorrows to him this morning.