
WHOM ARE WE TO PLEASE

BY MICHAEL CARD

And 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.

Hebrews 11:6

The discussion occurred years ago, but it is still rolling around in my heart and mind. My wife, Susan, and I had come to another difficult place in our ministry together. There have been stresses all along, as there must be in any marriage, but things had come to an especially hard place for her as, in her frustration and confusion, she was trying to please everyone at once. When all the various demands came crashing in on her, she came to me one evening with this question; "Tell me who am I supposed to please?"

In a world filled with erroneous and misdirecting questions, this is a good one, perhaps the best question we could ever ask. (Isn't it interesting that pain always causes us to ask the best questions?)

Instead of giving her an answer off the top of my head, like I usually do, I asked her to give me some time to look through the Bible and provide the best answer I could find. The next day I handed her this letter:

I have thought and prayed concerning the question you asked me last night. The appropriate answer is only one Word, but it needs to be spoken in more than one word. So, here are the best answers I can come up with.

Please God.

The first and most certain principle is that we exist to please God. This must be the simple basis from which we understand everything else. All the other circles of relationship must be centered in this idea of pleasing Him.

Next we must ask what is basic to pleasing Him. The answer to this must be "faith."

And 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.

Hebrews 11:6

According to this passage, believing that He exists must be the first

action that pleases God. Next comes the process of seeking Him. This also pleases God. The motive force both of believing and seeking is faith. So, to the question, "Who am I to please?" The answer is "God." To the question, "How do I please Him?" The answer is, "By first believing in Him and second by seeking Him."

Please Him Only

By myself I can do nothing... for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."

John 5:30

The second idea that seems clear to me is that next to pleasing God there is nothing else. This must be the only desire in the center of our will. To place anything else next to pleasing God is to take Him out of the center. He must occupy this place alone.

We are clearly not supposed to spend our lives pleasing ourselves. Jesus' life reveals that the call is to let go of the desire to please ourselves. Jesus chose not to please Himself. (Cp. Romans 15:3)

Serve Others

Your original question came from the frustration of trying to please everyone else. Once we see that we are only called to please God, then our obligation to others becomes clearer. Paul says we are to serve one another in love. (Gal. 5:13) The clear example of Jesus is that we are to demonstrate our desire to love and please God by serving one another.

I know you well enough to know you're wondering, "Didn't Jesus say to serve God only?" (Mat. 4:10) Yes, of course He did. But the two are not mutually exclusive, in fact, they are inextricably bound together. Paul expresses this best in Ephesians 6:7 when he says we must "Serve whole heartedly, as if we were serving the Lord and not man."

One last thought. Sometimes we confuse serving with pleasing. But serving people does not always mean pleasing them. I may serve an alcoholic by helping him give up the bottle, but this will not necessarily please him. It seems this is especially true in Christian service. As you and I seek to please God alone with out believing and seeking Him, and as we in response seek to serve others for His sake alone, we will inevitably meet with those who neither want nor think they need our service. In the end, Jesus served the whole world, he pleased very few.

So to your question, "who am I supposed to please?"

My answer, from the Bible, would be:

You are to please God only. In order to please Him you must believe in Him, and then seek Him. In the process of seeking and getting to know Him you will be called to serve the people to whom He calls you. Serving them will not always please them, in fact sometimes it will cause them to misunderstand and dislike you. This type of suffering was experienced by Jesus as well and this is our comfort in bearing it ourselves.

I hope this makes some sense. ☺