

A close-up photograph of a man in a blue suit and dark tie, giving a thumbs up gesture with his right hand. He is wearing a dark wristwatch. The background is dark and out of focus.

RICHARD BAXTER

**THE SIN OF
MAN-PLEASEING**



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The Sin of Man-Pleasing
or that overvaluing the Favour and
Censure of Man,
which is the Fruit of Pride, and a great
cause of Hypocrisy;
or, Directions against Idolizing Man.
by Richard Baxter

Introduction:

Directions Against Inordinate Man-Pleasing

As in other cases, so in this, iniquity does not simply consist in the heart's neglect of God, but in the preferring of some competitor, and the prevalence of some object which stands up for an opposing interest. Thus, obeying man before God, or against Him, and valuing the favour and approbation of man before or against the approbation of God, and fearing man's censure or displeasure more than God's, is an idolising of man, or setting him up in the place of God. It diverts our chief observance, care, labour, pleasure, and grief into this human, fleshly channel, making all that should be divine in our hearts and lives become merely human. This is a great and

dangerous sin, partaking of impiety, hypocrisy, and pride, and it deserves special attention in my directions, along with watchfulness and consideration to escape it.

As all other creatures, so especially man, must be regarded and valued only in a due subordination and subservience to God. If they are valued otherwise, they become His enemies, and are therefore to be despised, becoming the principal engine of the ruin of those who overvalue them. See what Scripture says of this sin:

Isaiah 2:22: “Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?”

Matthew 23:9: “And call no man your father upon the earth; for one is your Father, which is in heaven.”

Matthew 23:8: “And be not called Rabbi, for one is your Master, even Christ: but he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.”

Jeremiah 17:5: “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm.”

Psalms 118:6, 8-9: “The Lord is on my side; I will not fear what man can do unto me. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man—yea, in princes.”

Job 32:21-22: “Let me not accept any man's person, neither let me give flattering titles unto man: for I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my Maker would soon take me away.”

Job 21:4: “As for me, is my complaint to man?”

Galatians 1:10: “Do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be a servant of Christ.”

1 Corinthians 4:3: “But with me it is a very small thing to be judged by you, or by man's judgment.”

Luke 14:26: “If any man comes to me, and does not hate his

father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”

Matthew 5:11-12: “Blessed are you when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven.”

Ephesians 6:6; Colossians 3:22: “Not with eye-service, as men-pleasers.”

1 Thessalonians 2:4: “So we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who tries our hearts.”

Jude 16: “Having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage.”

This is enough to show what Scripture says about inordinate man-pleasing or excessive respect for man. I shall now proceed to direct you on how to escape it.

Direction I: Do Not Run to the Opposite Extreme

Understand well wherein the nature of this sin consists, so that you may not run into the contrary extreme, and may know which way to bend your opposition. I shall therefore first show you how far we may and must please men, and how far not.

The Proper Respect We Are to Have Towards Men

1. Our parents, rulers, and superiors must be honoured, obeyed, and pleased in all things they require of us, within the respective places of authority which God has given them over us. This must not be merely as to man, but as to the officers of God, from whom and for whom (and not against Him) they derive all their power (Romans 13; Exodus 20:12; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13; 2 Peter 2:10).
2. We must, in charity, condescension, and meekness of behaviour, seek to please all men in order to their salvation. We should so thirst for the conversion of sinners that we become all things (lawful) to all men, that we may win them. We must not stand upon our terms or keep distant from them but condescend to the lowest and bear the infirmities of the weak. In matters indifferent, we should not follow the course that pleases ourselves but that which, by pleasing him, may edify our weak brother. We must forbear, forgive, and relinquish our rights, denying ourselves the use of our Christian liberty for as long as we live, if necessary for the saving of our brethren's souls, by removing the offence that hinders them through prejudice. We must not seek our own carnal ends, but the benefit of others, doing them all the good we can.
3. As our neighbour is commanded to love us as himself, we are bound by all lawful means to render ourselves amiable to him, so that we may help facilitate his love towards us, as it is more necessary to him than to us. For to help him obey so great a command must surely be a great duty. Therefore, if his sin fills him with prejudice against us or causes him to dislike us for some indifferent thing, we must, as far as we can lawfully, remove the cause of his prejudice and dislike. However, one who hates us for obeying God must not be cured by our disobeying

Him. We are far from being obliged to displease men through surliness and morosity; instead, we are bound to pleasing gentleness, brotherly kindness, and all conduct necessary to cure their sinful hatred or dislike.

4. We must not be self-conceited, preferring our weak, ill-equipped judgement over the greater wisdom of another. In honour, we must prefer one another, and the ignorant must respect the knowledge and abilities of others that excel them. We should not be obstinate in our own opinion, nor wise in our own eyes, nor undervalue another man's reasons or judgement, but be glad to learn from any who can teach us, humbly acknowledging our own insufficiency.
5. We must especially reverence the judgement of our able and faithful teachers, not pridefully setting up our weaker judgement against them, nor resisting the truth they deliver to us from God. Neither should we make light of the censures or admonitions of the lawful pastors of the church. When their rebukes align with the Word and judgement of God, they are very solemn. As Tertullian says, if anyone offends to the extent that they are banished from the communion of prayer, assembly, and all holy fellowship, it is a judgement preceding the great judgement to come. Even if the officers of Christ wrong you in their censures through passion or mistake, while acting within their authority and over matters belonging to their cognisance and judgement, you must bear the wrong respectfully and patiently, without dishonouring or despising the authority and office, even when misused.
6. If sober, godly persons who are well acquainted with us strongly suspect us to be at fault, even when we do not perceive it in ourselves, this should make us more suspicious and fearful. If

judicious persons suspect you to be hypocrites and not sound Christians, based on their observations of your temper and course of life, this should prompt you to examine yourself with greater fear and not disregard their judgement. Likewise, if wise persons, especially ministers, tell a poor, fearful, doubting Christian that they sincerely believe their state to be safe, this may serve as a great comfort and should not be dismissed, even though it cannot provide absolute certainty regarding their condition. Thus far, man's judgement must be valued.

7. A good name among men, which is the reputation of our integrity, should not be neglected as something of no importance. It is a mercy from God for which we must be thankful, and it is a useful means to serve and honour God effectively. The more eminent we are, and the more the honour of God and religion is linked to our reputation, or the good of men's souls depends on it, the more careful we should be in maintaining it. At times, it may even be a duty to defend our reputation through the magistrate's justice, especially against slander. Preachers, in particular (whose success in saving their hearers depends greatly on their good name), must not despise it.
8. The censures of the most insolent, and the scorns of enemies, should not be taken lightly, as they are their sins, which we must lament. Neither should we dismiss them, as they can provoke us to more diligent self-examination and careful watchfulness over our ways. Thus far, man's judgement is worthy of consideration.

Consider the Nature of Man in General

1. We must first recognise how frail, erroneous, and inconstant man is. Therefore, we should not set our expectations too high regarding others. We should anticipate that people will misunderstand, wrong, and slander us due to ignorance, passion, prejudice, or self-interest. When this happens, it should not be considered strange or unexpected.
2. We must also understand how far the enmity in fallen man towards holiness, along with the ignorance, prejudice, and passion of the ungodly, will drive them to despise, scorn, and slander those who earnestly and zealously serve God and oppose their carnal interests. Thus, if, for the sake of Christ and righteousness, we are treated as the scorn and outcasts of all things, accused as pestilent fellows, movers of sedition, or as people unworthy to live, and all kinds of false accusations are spoken against us, it should not come as a surprise. We must not be cast down but bear it patiently, even rejoicing exceedingly in the hope of our reward in heaven.
3. Given the remnants of pride and self-conceit in many who possess true grace, and considering how many hypocrites are in the church whose religion consists primarily of opinions and various modes of worship, we must expect reproach and abuse from those who differ from us in opinions, modes, and circumstances, and thus perceive us as adversaries. Much injustice, whether in the form of slander, reproach, or even greater violence, must be anticipated from contentious individuals within the same faith. This is particularly true when the interests of their faction demand it, or if we bring a truth

among them that seems new or contradicts opinions held in high esteem, or if we attempt to reform them in anything amiss.

4. We must not please any man by committing sin, nor value their favour more than that of God. Man's favour, when opposed to God's, is to be despised, and their displeasure taken lightly. If fulfilling our duty displeases them, so be it; we can only pity them.
5. We must place none of our happiness in the favour or approbation of men, regarding it as a matter of little importance. It is neither worth great effort to attain nor grief to lose. We should not only esteem it lightly in comparison to the favour and approval of God, but we must also consider it as transitory, valuing it only as a means to a higher end—namely, the service of God and the greater good of ourselves or others. Beyond this, it should matter little to us what men think or say about us. The unjust displeasure of all men must be counted among our light afflictions.
6. One truth of God, and the smallest duty, must be preferred over the favour and approval of all men. However, as a means to promote a greater truth or duty, the favour and approval of men may sometimes be preferred over the expression of a lesser truth or the performance of a lesser good at a given time. In such cases, it may not be our duty to pursue the lesser truth or good.
7. Our hearts are naturally selfish and deceitful. Therefore, when we are deeply concerned about our reputation, we must carefully examine our motives to ensure that we are not using God's honour as a pretense for seeking our own. We must be particularly vigilant to make certain that it is truly the honour of God, the advancement of religion, the good of souls, or some

greater benefit than honour itself, that causes us to value our own honour and reputation.

8. Human nature is so prone to overvalue the esteem of others that we should be more wary of erring on the side of esteeming it too highly, rather than on the side of undervaluing it. It is far safer to do too little than too much when defending our reputation, whether through the magistrate's justice, by disputing, or through any contentious means.
9. We must not rely entirely on the judgement of others regarding the state of our souls, nor assume their judgement to be infallible. Rather, we should use their counsel as a means to better know ourselves.
10. If ministers or councils, even those deemed "general," err and contradict the Word of God, we must strive to discern this, and having discerned it, abandon their error in favour of God's truth. As Calvin, followed by Paraeus in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 4:3, states: "We must give an account of our doctrine to all men who require it, especially to ministers and councils. But when a faithful pastor finds himself oppressed by unrighteous and perverse designs and factions, and when there is no room for equity and truth, he ought to disregard man's esteem and appeal to God, seeking His tribunal. And if we see ourselves condemned without a fair hearing, let us lift up our minds to magnanimity, despising the judgement of men, and boldly awaiting the judgement of God." As Paul said, "With me, it is a small matter to be judged by you, or by any human court; I have one who judges me, even the Lord."
11. God must be enough for a gracious soul. We must understand that "in His favour is life," and that His "loving-kindness is

better than life itself." Our goal and effort must be that, whether living or dying, we may be accepted by Him. If we have His approval, it should satisfy us, even if the entire world condemns us. Therefore, having faithfully done our duty, we should leave the matter of our reputation to God. If our ways please Him, He can make our enemies be at peace with us, or render them harmless as if they were no enemies at all. Just as we must leave to God the measure of wealth we shall have, so too we must leave to Him the measure of honour we shall have. It is our duty to love and honour, but not necessarily to be loved and honoured.

12. We must continue to believe the prophecy of our Saviour, that "the world will hate us." His example must remain ever before our eyes, as He submitted to being spat upon, scorned, and buffeted, slandered as a traitor or usurper of the crown, and "made Himself of no reputation." He "endured the cross" and "despised the shame," leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps. He "committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously." This is the treatment a Christian must expect—to not be spoken well of by all, nor to receive the applause and honour of the world.
 13. We must not only set little value on the approval of the ignorant and ungodly, but even on that of the most learned and godly, if God chooses to try us in this way. We must bear their censures lightly and be content in God alone, waiting for His final judgement.
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Direction II

Beware of the Snare of Man's Favour

Remember that the favour and pleasing of man is one of the snares that would draw you away from pleasing God. Therefore, guard against its danger, just as you would guard against other earthly temptations.

Direction III

The Insignificance of Man's Favour

Consider how insignificant man is. His favour can be no better than himself. The thoughts or words of a mortal creature are of little value to us.

Direction IV

The Ultimate Judgment of God

Remember that it is God's judgement alone upon which your eternal life or death depends, and how little you should be concerned with the judgement of man.

The Judgement of God Compared to that of Man

1. A humbled soul, having experienced what it means to have displeased God, felt the weight of His curse, and been reconciled to Him through the death and intercession of Jesus Christ, is so occupied with seeking God's favour. Such a soul is troubled by every fear of His displeasure and delighted with the sense of His love, that it scarcely has time to dwell on such a small matter as the favour or displeasure of men. God's favour is sufficient, and so precious, that if this is secured, the favour of men is hardly missed.
2. God alone is our supreme Judge, and our earthly rulers are merely officers, limited by Him. As for others, if they act as usurpers, setting themselves in God's throne and casting their censures on matters which do not concern them, why should we be overly concerned? If a beggar were to sit in a seat of judgement, condemning one person and fining another, would you fear him, or laugh at him? "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master, he stands or falls." Men may presume to sit in God's judgement seat and pass judgements based on their own interests and passions, but God will soon pull them down and teach them their proper place. The common censure of the world is often no more than childish games—like boys playing court, judging and condemning one another in jest. But have we not a far greater Judge to fear?
3. It is God alone who passes the final sentence, from which there is no appeal. From human judgement, however, there is always an appeal to God. Human judgements must themselves be judged by Him, and things will not stand as men censure them now. Many bad causes are presently judged as good due to the multitude or influence of those who support them, while many good causes are condemned. Many are accused as wrongdoers

simply because they obey God and do their duty. But all these judgements will be reconsidered by Him who has declared, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness” (Isaiah 5:20). “He who says to the wicked, 'You are righteous,' people will curse him, and nations will abhor him” (Proverbs 24:24).

It would go ill for the best of Christ’s servants if the world’s judgement were final, for they condemn them as fools, hypocrites, or worse. But it is the wise man whom God will judge to be wise at last, and it is only the happy man whom God will call happy. The erring judgement of a creature is like an ignorant man labelling jars in an apothecary’s shop—writing “poison” on some and “antidote” on others, with the contents not corresponding to the labels. They are not to be valued by their labels but by their true content. How different are the labels that God and the world place on things and people now! So few approve what God approves of and will justify in the end. Many whom God will judge as heterodox and wicked are now regarded as orthodox and praiseworthy by men, while many whom God will judge as orthodox and sincere are now labelled heretics and hypocrites. God will not endorse every accusation made against His servants, uttered by angry men or contentious disputants.

The learning, authority, or other advantages of certain contenders may now overshadow the reasoning and reputations of more righteous and wise men, but God will vindicate the latter in the end. The names of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and many other excellent servants of the Lord are now sullied in the writings and reports of papists through impudent lies, but God judges differently, with perfect righteousness. Oh, what a great number of persons and causes will be justified on that dreadful day of the Lord, which the

world has condemned! And how many will be condemned on that day, who were justified by the world!

O blessed day, most desirable for the just, most terrifying for the wicked and every hypocrite! How many things will then be set straight that are now crooked! How many innocent saints will experience the resurrection of their defamed names, buried by the world under heaps of lies, while their enemies never thought they would be vindicated! O, look forward to that final judgement of the Lord, and you will view the censures of men as nothing more than the shaking of a leaf.

4. It is God alone who has the power to execute His sentence, either for our happiness or misery. "There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy" (James 4:12). If He says to us, "Come, you blessed," we shall be happy, even if devils and men curse us, for those whom He blesses shall indeed be blessed. If He condemns us to hell, the applause of the world cannot rescue us or provide any comfort. A great name on earth, histories written in our praise, or a gilded monument over our bones, offer no relief to damned souls. Conversely, the scorn and insults of the wicked on earth do nothing to diminish the joy or glory of the souls who triumph with Christ. It is our Lord who "holds the keys of death and hell" (Revelation 1:18). Please Him, and you are assured of escape, no matter the dire curses thundered against you by the pope or the wicked of the world. Woe to us if the wicked had the power to execute all their malicious judgements! How many saints would then be in hell! But if it is God who justifies us, how insignificant it is who condemns us or what their authority might be (Romans 8:33).

Direction V: Be Wary of the Judgement of Ungodly Men

Remember that the judgement of ungodly men is corrupted and directed by the devil. To be ruled by their censures or to fear them too much is to be ruled by the devil and afraid of his judgement. Will you honour him so much? It is he who puts such thoughts into the minds of the ungodly and such reproachful words into their mouths. Preferring the judgement of man before God's is odious enough without preferring the devil's judgement as well.

Direction VI: The Slavery of Man-Pleasing

Consider the slavery you choose when you make yourselves servants of every man whose censures you fear and whose approval you seek. "You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men" (1 Corinthians 7:23)—that is, do not needlessly entrap yourselves. What a burden man-pleasers carry! They have as many masters as they do onlookers. No wonder it distracts them from the service of God, for "friendship with the world is enmity with God," and "whoever wants to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4). You cannot serve two masters—God and the world. You know that men will condemn you if you are true to God. If you must have the favour of men, you will have it without God's favour. A man-pleaser cannot be true to God, because he serves the enemies of God's service. The breath of human praise will drive him like chaff, away from any duty and towards any sin. How servile is a man-pleaser! How many masters does he serve, and how unworthy are they! This path perverts the course of your heart and life, turning you away from God toward an unprofitable endeavour.

Direction VII: The Pitiful Reward of Man-Pleasing

Consider the miserable reward you seek. "Truly," says our Lord concerning hypocrites and man-pleasers, "they have their reward" (Matthew 6:2). O what a wretched reward! The fleeting thoughts and words of mortal men in place of God, in place of heaven—this is their reward! Their reward will be to lie in hell, remembering that they were once spoken of well on earth, that they were once regarded as religious, learned, wise, or honourable. They will recall that they preferred this reward over everlasting happiness with Christ! If this is not gain, then all your labour in hunting for applause is in vain. If this paltry reward is enough to spend your time pursuing, to neglect your God, and to lose your soul for, then rejoice in the hypocrite's reward.

Direction VIII: The Paradox of Honour

Remember that honour is one of those things more easily found by those who hold it in honest contempt than by those who seek it with excessive desire. It is like a shadow—if you chase after it, it eludes you; but if you walk away from it, it follows you. Whose names are now more esteemed on earth than those prophets, apostles, martyrs, preachers, and devout, self-denying Christians, who in their time cared the least for the world's approval? Many of them were mocked, scorned, and treated as mere playthings in the age they lived. Yet, those who were satisfied with the approval of their heavenly Father, who "saw them in secret," have been "rewarded openly" by Him.

Even to the rational mind, it is a far greater honour to live for God, above the pursuit of worldly praise, than to hunt for recognition. The

more a person is seen to desire and chase after honour, the less of it they actually receive. People see the desperation in such seeking—they sense the neediness. They perceive it as pitiable, as if the seeker is playing a low, miserable game for their approval. Just as one would despise a man who licked up the spittle of others, so too will people look down on those who live on the opinions of others. Ironically, they honour more those who live for God alone.

Direction IX: The Futility of Pleasing Everyone

If nothing else cures this obsession with honour, let the sheer impossibility of pleasing all men be reason enough to abandon such a futile pursuit. Consider how impossible it is—or at the very least, how unreasonable it is to expect success in this attempt.

You cannot please everyone.

The Folly of Trying to Please Men

1. Remember how many people you would have to please, and even when you have satisfied some, many more will remain displeased. Even after doing your best, there will be others left dissatisfied. We are simply incapable of pleasing all those who expect something from us. You are like a person with twelve pence in his purse, surrounded by a thousand beggars, each expecting to receive it all. If you resolve to give everything you

have to the poor, and do so to please God, you may reach your goal. However, if you do it to please people, once you have pleased the few who receive it, perhaps twice as many will revile or curse you for giving them nothing. The beggar who is helped will praise your generosity, while the one who receives nothing will accuse you of being miserly and unmerciful. Thus, more people will be offended and dishonour you than will comfort you with their praise—if that is what you seek as your comfort.

2. Remember that all men are inherently selfish, and their expectations will often exceed what you are able to provide. They will not consider your limitations, other obligations, or the good you do for others, but will expect the same from you as if you had no one else to care for but them. Many times, when I have had an hour or a day to spare, a multitude of people expected that I would spend it with them. When I visited one person, ten others were offended that I was not visiting them at the same time. When I spoke to one, many more were offended that I was not addressing them all at once. If those I spoke with found me courteous, humble, and respectful, those I could not speak to, or only addressed briefly, thought me discourteous and rude. I have been censured because I did not grant people the time that God and my conscience commanded me to spend on greater and more necessary work. If you have an office to grant or a benefit to bestow that only one can receive, everyone will think they are the most deserving. Once you have pleased the one who receives it, you will have displeased all the others who missed out.
3. You have many people to please who are ignorant, unreasonable, and weak, mistaking your greatest virtues for faults and not knowing when you do well or poorly. Yet, no one is bolder in their criticisms than those who least understand

what they are judging. Many times, my own and others' sermons have been censured and defamed for things that were never in them, simply due to the ignorance or carelessness of a censorious hearer—sometimes even for the very things that were spoken against in the sermon, simply because they were not understood. Especially for someone who has a concise, non-repetitive style, where every word must be carefully attended to in order to be understood, they are often misreported and misunderstood.

4. You will have many factious zealots to contend with—people who, being strangers to the love of holiness, Christianity, and unity, are ruled by sectarian interests and opinions. These individuals will never be pleased with you unless you join their side or conform to their particular views. If you do not actively oppose them but instead work toward reconciling differences in the church, they will hate you for not promoting their opinions and for weakening their cause through what they perceive as abhorrent compromises. Just as in civil wars, in ecclesiastical conflicts, the zealots cannot tolerate the peaceable. If you remain neutral, they will treat you as an enemy. No matter how much you may be for Christ, holiness, and shared truth, it will count for nothing unless you also support their cause and their opinions.
5. Most of the world are haters of holiness, bearing a serpentine enmity toward the image of God, as they have not been renewed by the Holy Spirit. They will not be pleased with you unless you sin against your Lord and follow their ways. As 1 Peter 4:3-5 says, "Walking in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries, wherein they think it strange that you do not run with them into the same excess of

riot, speaking evil of you. They will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." You will be regarded like Lot among the Sodomites—a meddlesome fellow who judges them and dares to reprove their actions if you speak of their sin. You will be labelled a self-righteous hypocrite (or worse) if you refuse to partake in their wickedness, and by your abstinence (even if you say nothing), you seem to condemn their sensuality and disregard for God. Among the insane, you must act the fool if you wish to escape their ridicule. Do you expect to please such people?

6. You will also encounter satanic God-haters and those with seared consciences, filled with malice and cruelty, who will only be pleased by horrid iniquity—by the damning of your own soul and the corruption of others. Such individuals, like the monster of Milan, who made his fallen enemy blaspheme God in hopes of saving his life and then killed him, calling it "noble revenge," aim to destroy both body and soul. There are people in the world who visibly act as agents of the devil, attempting to debauch your conscience with the most heinous perjury, treachery, and impiety, so they can triumph over your ruined soul. If you think it's worth the eternal damnation of your soul, perhaps they can be pleased. But if you tell them, "We cannot please you unless we are dishonest, displease God, sin against our conscience, and risk our salvation," they will mock such arguments, expecting you to sacrifice your soul on the altar of their whims, caring as little for God and your soul as they do for their own. Desperate sinners loathe to go to hell alone; it torments them to see others better than themselves. Those who are cruel and unmerciful to their own souls, selling them for a whore, preferment, honour, or sensual pleasure, will not hesitate to drag others down with them. "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew

27:25).

7. You will also have to deal with rigid, captious, uncharitable, and unjust individuals who will "make a man an offender for a word, lay a snare for him that reproves at the gate, turn aside the just for a thing of nought, and watch for iniquity" (Isaiah 29:20-21). Such people lack the charity that covers faults and interprets words and actions charitably. They also lack the justice that makes one treat others as they themselves would want to be treated, judging others as they would wish to be judged. These individuals, who judge without mercy, are bound to receive judgement without mercy. They relish finding something to reproach you for, and once they have discovered it—whether true or false—they will never forget it. Like a fly on a sore, they will dwell on that fault relentlessly.
8. You will also encounter people so consumed by passion that their judgement is blinded, making them incapable of being pleased. Like those who are sick or sore, who are hurt by the slightest touch, these individuals, as Seneca notes, may even imagine they've been touched when they haven't. How can you possibly please them when displeasure is their disease, residing deep within their hearts?
9. Censoriousness is a common vice. Though few people are truly competent to judge your actions—being unfamiliar with all the details—almost everyone will venture to cast their judgement. A proud and presumptuous understanding is a widespread flaw. People tend to think themselves capable of judging as soon as they hear only a fragment of the situation, and they are unaware of their own fallibility, even though they experience it daily. Few are close enough to understand your circumstances, and none

can know your heart. They do not grasp the reasons behind your actions, nor hear your side of the story, yet they presume to judge you. In many cases, if they had only heard you speak, they might have absolved you. It is rare even among the most sincere believers to find those who are cautious and fearful of sinning by passing rash, ungrounded judgements, without the capacity or authority to do so.

10. You live among gossipers and tale-bearers who seek to please others by accusing you. Who, with ears, has not encountered such earwigs constantly whispering? Except for the occasional upright person, whose stern countenance has always driven away backbiting tongues, most will speak ill of you behind your back when you cannot defend yourself. If the accuser is someone the listeners think well of, they feel justified in believing them. Friends and allies of the accuser will surely think them credible. It is not uncommon even for learned, intelligent, or godly individuals to be too quick to spread an evil report they have heard from others, and then the listener feels fully justified in believing and repeating it. Even David, tempted by Ziba, wronged Mephibosheth, the son of his great friend, as recorded in 2 Samuel 16:3. So, it is no surprise that Saul listened to Doeg, leading to David's wrong and the slaughter of the priests. "The words of a tale-bearer are like wounds" (Proverbs 18:8). "Where no wood is, the fire goes out; so where there is no tale-bearer, the strife ceases" (Proverbs 26:20). When tale-bearers are close and you are far away, it is easy for them to perpetuate the most odious misrepresentations of even the most virtuous person's actions.
11. The imperfection of human understanding and godliness is so great that even among the best people, differences of judgement

can cause injury and undervaluing of their brethren. One person is confident that his way is right, while another is just as confident of the opposite. These differences can lead to great contentions and injuries. If you are unaware of how far such disputes can go in this age, I will not need to elaborate. There is no need to look back to Paul and Barnabas (whose disagreement was relatively mild) or to Epiphanius, Jerome, and Chrysostom, or to the tragic disputes among bishops in the Eastern and Western churches before us. Each person thought their cause so clear that they justified themselves in everything they said and did against those who dared to differ from them. Surely you can expect some displeasure even from good and learned people when the church still suffers from dreadful divisions, bleeding from the remnants of pride and ignorance for which its revered leaders have long been guilty.

12. You will also find that many people are highly fickle—one moment ready to worship you as a god, the next to stone you or call you a devil, as they did with Paul and Christ Himself. How changeable is the mind of man, especially among the common people and those who conform to the times! You could spend your entire life building your reputation on this sand, only for one blast of wind or storm to tear it all down, and all your effort will be lost. Serve people as submissively and carefully as you can, but in the end, some event or failure to meet their unjust expectations may cause them to forget all the good you have done, leaving you abandoned. You may even face a fate like Wolsey, who lamented, "If I had served God as faithfully as man, I would have been better rewarded, and not forsaken in my distress." How many have fallen by the hands or frowns of those whose favour they had purchased, perhaps even at the cost of their own salvation! If you ever put such confidence in a friend

that you do not consider they may one day become your enemy, you do not truly know human nature and may painfully learn it through bitter experience.

13. Every person is inevitably engaged by God Himself in duties that are liable to misinterpretation. These actions may have an outward appearance of evil, offending those who are unaware of the full context and circumstances. This is why much of history is of little worth, as the actions of public figures are often only half-understood by most who write about them. Many rely on hearsay or only know the outward appearances, not the spirit, life, and reality of the situation. People do not choose their own duties; God assigns them by His law and providence. He often tests His servants in this way, allowing many aspects of their actions to remain unknown to others. If known, these details would justify their actions. Instead, they are judged as notorious, scandalous people because these justifying circumstances are not understood. Consider how the Israelites taking the goods of the Egyptians appeared, or Abraham's attempt to sacrifice his son, or David's eating of the showbread and dancing nearly naked before the ark. Christ's eating and drinking with publicans and sinners, Paul's circumcising of Timothy, and his purification in the temple are further examples—such things happen in the life of every Christian. No wonder Joseph considered putting Mary away until he understood the miracle of her conception. How vulnerable to censure she was by those who did not know! Oh, how vain is the judgement of man! How often it contradicts the truth! How carefully should we read history! And how desirable is the great day of God, when all human judgements shall be justly judged!

14. The perverseness of some people is so great that they demand contradictions and impossibilities from you, revealing that they are determined never to be pleased. If John fasts, they say, "He has a demon." If Christ comes "eating and drinking," they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matthew 11:18-19). If your judgement and practice align with those in authority, especially if they have changed, you will be judged a knave and a temporizer. If they do not align, you will be seen as disobedient, rebellious, and seditious. Speak in a gentle and pleasing manner, and you will be called a flatterer and a dissembler. Speak more freely, even when necessary, and they will accuse you of railing.

If I accept a position of honour, they will call me ambitious, proud, and worldly. If I refuse it, no matter how modestly, they will say I am discontented or harbour seditious plans. If I refrain from preaching when forbidden, they will accuse me of forsaking my calling and obeying man over God. If I do preach, I will be deemed disobedient and seditious. Should a friend or relative ask me for help in securing a position they are unfit for, or one that would harm another, if I grant the request, I will be considered dishonest, having wronged another through partiality. If I refuse, I will be called unnatural, unfriendly, or worse than an infidel.

If I give to the poor as long as I have the means, I will be criticised for stopping when I have no more. Those unaware of my financial situation will be displeased if I stop giving. Even if I supported them freely for years, it will count for nothing once I cease, whether because my resources are depleted or because another person now requires my charity. If I am wronged and take legal action, they will say I am contentious. If I give up my rights to avoid a dispute, they will say I am foolish.

If my charitable works are known to others, I will be called a hypocrite, seeking praise. If I do them in secret, I will be called covetous, accused of doing no good despite my profession of faith. Others will be judged on my account as well. If I am cheerful and light-hearted, I will be considered frivolous and vain. If I am more serious or solemn, they will say I am melancholy or discontented. In short, whatever you do, some will condemn it. Whether you act or refrain, speak or remain silent, you will inevitably displease someone and will never escape the censures of the world.

15. Among men, there is such a great diversity of judgements, dispositions, and interests that they will never agree among themselves. If you please one, you will displease another. The person you please may be an enemy to another, and therefore, by pleasing him, you displease his enemy. At times, political divisions split kingdoms into opposing factions. If you align with one side, the other will be displeased. If you remain neutral or reject both, both sides may accuse you. Each faction believes their cause justifies any accusation or offensive titles they might impose on you, as well as any suffering they can inflict.

Similarly, religious differences and sects have existed throughout all ages. You cannot adopt the opinion of every group, especially when the world is filled with such a variety of beliefs. You cannot hold all views at once. If you support one party, you will displease the rest. If you favour one side in a contentious issue, the other will label you erroneous. The supposed interest of their cause and party will drive them to great lengths. At present, one half of the Christian world condemns the other half as schismatic, while the other half returns the same judgement. Can you be a papist, a protestant, a

Greek, and everything else at once? If not, you must displease as many people as you please.

Indeed, if fickle people change their positions frequently, they will expect you to change with them. Whatever their contrary interests demand, you must follow. One year you may be required to swear an oath, and the next year to recant it. Whatever cause or action they engage in, no matter how evil, you must approve and endorse it. You will be expected to declare that all they do is right. In short, you must teach yourself to say or swear anything, selling your integrity and conscience to their service, or you cannot please them. Like Micaiah, you must prophesy "Go and prosper" as the rest of the prophets did, or you will be hated for speaking evil instead of good concerning Ahab (1 Kings 22:8).

How can you serve all interests at once? It seems that God, by His providence, has purposely arranged the affairs of the world to expose and shame man-pleasers and those who shift with the changing winds of the times. It is evident, then, that if you seek to please everyone, you will have to both speak and be silent, affirm contradictions, be in many places at once, and hold all men's opinions at the same time. As for me, I will wait until the world is better united before I make it my ambition to please them. If you can reconcile all their opinions, interests, temperaments, and dispositions, and make them all of one mind and will, then you may hope to please them.

16. Even if you excel in any virtue or duty, malicious people will not excuse you from slander. Such people are so unreasonable that no amount of virtue will shield you from their defamatory tongues. The perfect holiness of Jesus Christ could not protect

Him from being called a glutton and a drunkard, or a friend of tax collectors and sinners. His complete disregard for worldly honours and dignities, and His submission to Caesar, could not prevent Him from being slandered and crucified as Caesar's enemy. The great piety of early Christians did not exempt them from accusations of gathering for immoral acts in secret, nor from the rabble's cry of *Tollite impios*—"Away with the ungodly!"—because they refused to worship idols.

I have known those who gave everything they had to the poor, except what they needed for survival, yet they were still reproached as unmerciful by those who did not receive what they expected. Many people have been defamed with scandalous rumours of immorality, even though they lived lives of untainted chastity. The most eminent saints have been accused of the most horrendous crimes, which they had never even imagined.

The principal focus of my studies and efforts has been the reconciliation, unity, and peace of Christians, and opposing unpeaceableness, uncharitableness, turbulence, and division. Yet there are those whose interests and malice have driven them to accuse me of the very sin I have spent my life fighting against. How often have opposing factions charged me with entirely contradictory accusations! I can scarcely think of any action I could take without offending someone. No duty is so clear that it would not be called sin by some, and no self-denial so great (even at the risk of my life) that it would not be labeled self-serving. Therefore, instead of serving and seeking to please this malicious and unjust world, I disregard their blind and unjust judgements and appeal to the most righteous God.

17. If your aim is to secure a name of honour after your death, consider the power that a prevailing faction may have to distort the history of your life. They could represent you to future generations as completely different from who you were. It is impossible for posterity to discern which histories are the result of malicious, shameless lies and which are the narratives of impartial truth. For instance, consider the conflicting accounts of certain historical figures written by people of the same religion—such as Pope Gregory VII and the emperors who opposed him, or Pope John and other similar cases. You can find dozens of historians on either side of these debates, each presenting entirely contradictory accounts.

18. Remember that even the holiest saints and apostles could never please the world, nor escape its censures, slanders, and cruelties—no, not even Jesus Christ Himself. Do you think you can, by honest means, succeed in pleasing them better than Christ and all His saints? You do not possess the wisdom that Christ had to please men or to avoid giving offence. You lack the perfect innocence and blamelessness that He had. You cannot heal their sicknesses and infirmities or do the good that Christ did to win their favour. You cannot convince or compel them to respect you through miracles, as Jesus Christ did.

Can you emulate the excellent example set by the holy, patient, charitable, and tireless apostle Paul? Acts 20; 1 Corinthians 4, 9; 2 Corinthians 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12. If you cannot, how can you expect to please those who would not be pleased by such unparalleled works of love and power? The more Paul "loved" some of his hearers, "the less he was loved" (2 Corinthians 12:15). They treated him "as an enemy for telling them the truth" (Galatians 4:16). Though he "became all things to all men," he

could only "save some," nor could he "please all" (1 Corinthians 9:22). And who are you to think you can do better?

19. Godliness, virtue, and honesty themselves will not please the world, so how can you hope to please them with something they hate? Will men be pleased by what they despise, by actions that seem to accuse and condemn them? If you choose to become ungodly and vicious to please them, you sell your soul, your conscience, and your God to gain their favour. God and the world are not pleased by the same things. Which do you think should take priority? If you displease God to win their favour, you will pay a high price.

20. The world is not even pleased with God Himself. In fact, no one displeases as many people as He does. Can you do more than God to please them? Can you deserve their favour more than He? People are constantly displeased with God's providence. One person wants rain, while another wants none. One desires favourable winds for his voyage, while another wishes for winds blowing in the opposite direction. One group is displeased when another is exalted. Every enemy wants victory for their side, every contender wants all outcomes to favour them.

God would have to conform to their desires, catering to the interests of the unjust and the will of the wicked, or they will not be pleased with Him. His holy nature, His holy Word, and His holy ways displease them more than His providence. They are displeased with His Word because it is so precise and strict. They resent that He commands them to live such a holy and disciplined life and threatens the ungodly with damnation. They would have Him change His laws, loosen His requirements, and

adjust His commands to fit their fleshly desires. Unless He changes their hearts, they will never be pleased with Him.

And how do you think they will react to Him at the final judgement when He fulfils His threats—when He kills them, turns their bodies to dust, and sends their guilty souls to torment and despair?

21. How can you possibly please men who cannot even please themselves? Their own desires and choices satisfy them only briefly. Like children, they soon tire of the things they cried for. They insist on having something, but once they have it, it is worthless, and they discard it. They are neither pleased with it nor without it.

They are like sick people who crave every food or drink that comes to mind, but once they have it, they cannot stomach it. The sickness within them is what causes their displeasure. How many people torment themselves with their own passions and foolishness, day after day? And can you hope to please such self-displeased individuals?

22. How can you hope to please others when you cannot even please yourselves? If you are people who fear God and feel the weight of your sins, and if you have enough spiritual life to be aware of your own failings, I dare say that there is no one in the world as displeasing to you as you are to yourselves. You carry within you that which displeases you more than all the enemies you have in the world—your passions and corruptions, your lack of love for God, your estrangement from Him and from eternal life, the daily faults in your duties and your lives. These are your daily burdens and cause you the most displeasure.

If you are not wise, able, or good enough to please yourselves, how can you expect to be wise, able, or good enough to please the world? Your sins are closest to you, but so are your graces; and just as you know more evil about yourself than others know, you also know more good. The small fire that does not warm the hearth it lies on will not warm the entire room.

Direction X: The Life of Torment in Seeking Man's Approval

Remember the life of unquietness and constant vexation you choose if you place your peace or happiness in the good will or words of men. Having shown you how impossible this task is, it follows that pursuing it will lead to a life of torment. You will engage in great cares, knowing you are certain to be disappointed. You will make your goal something you cannot attain, labouring in vain, only to meet with displeasure instead of the favour you expected. This must surely lead to a grievous life.

You are like someone living on top of a mountain, unable to endure the wind, or someone living in a forest, afraid of the rustling of leaves. You live among a world of selfish, contradictory, changeable, and unpleasable minds, yet you cannot bear their displeasure.

Are you a magistrate? The people will murmur against you, and the most unqualified will be the first to censure you, thinking they could govern better. Those who bear the necessary burdens of public safety will claim oppression, while malefactors will say you treat them without mercy. Even those with the most unjust causes will accuse you of wrongdoing if their case does not succeed.

Are you a pastor or teacher? One person will find you too harsh, another too lenient—even the same person will criticise you for being too harsh when you correct their faults and too lenient when dealing with others. No sermon you preach will please all your hearers, nor will any of your ministerial work be universally accepted.

Are you a lawyer? Clients who lose their case will accuse you of betrayal behind your back, and those who win will call you greedy, claiming you took too much money for too little work. It's no wonder your profession is often met with reproach among the public.

Are you a physician? You will be blamed for the deaths of patients and accused of being greedy, taking money whether the patient lives or dies. This is the common talk of the public, except for a few whose health has greatly improved due to your care.

Are you a tradesman? Most customers are so selfish that unless you impoverish yourself, they will say you deceive them, accusing you of selling goods too dearly. They give no thought to the necessary maintenance of your family or whether you can make a living through your trade. If you cheat yourself to sell them a good bargain, they will call you an honest man, but when you go bankrupt, they will accuse you of imprudence and defrauding your creditors. To please them, you would have to buy goods at a high price, sell them cheaply, and live at a loss.

Direction XI: The Pleasing of God is Your Primary Duty

Always remember that pleasing God is your main purpose in this world. In pleasing Him, your soul will find safety, rest, and complete contentment, even if the entire world should be displeased with you.

God is sufficient for you, and His approval and favour are your true portion and reward.

How sweet and secure is the life of those who are sincere and upright, who strive more to *be* good than to *seem* good. They know that if God accepts them, they have all they need. What a great mercy it is to possess an upright heart! Such a heart renounces the world and everything in it that competes with God. It takes God as its true God—its Lord, Judge, Portion, and All. In moments of temptation, it remembers the eye of God, and in every duty it is driven and governed by the will and pleasure of its divine Judge. The thoughts and opinions of men are regarded no more than the presence of a bird or beast, unless piety, justice, or charity require a consideration of others in proper submission to God.

When people praise someone as a person of great holiness and goodness, this person is cautious and concerned that the all-knowing God might view them differently than their admirers do. And even under the harshest criticisms, reproaches, and slanders of others—even if these come from well-meaning people in times of temptation—this individual can live in peace, resting in the approval of God alone. They can rejoice in their justification by their righteous Judge and gracious Redeemer, even when the unimportant judgements of men condemn them.

Truly, I cannot see how anyone but this kind of person can live a life of real, lasting peace and joy. If God's approval and favour do not bring you peace, nothing else can. If pleasing Him does not satisfy you, even when others—even good men, even all men—are displeased with you, then I do not know what will ever satisfy you. Indeed, if you can rise above the judgements and displeasure of the ungodly but not the godly, especially when God permits them (as

with Job's wife and friends) to test you, you will not be able to live a consistently content and peaceful life. And here, consider this further...

The Advantages of Pleasing God Rather Than Men

1. **Fewer to Please:** If you seek first to please God and are content with that, you have only one to please instead of many. A multitude of masters is far more difficult to satisfy than one.
2. **Reasonable Expectations:** God demands nothing unreasonable from you, whether in quantity or quality.
3. **Perfect Wisdom:** He is perfectly wise and good, never prone to misunderstanding your situation or actions.
4. **Holiness:** God is most holy and is not pleased by iniquity or dishonesty.
5. **Impartial Justice:** He is impartial and completely just, showing no favouritism (Acts 10:34).
6. **Competent Judge:** God is a competent judge, both qualified and with authority. He knows your heart and every circumstance and reason behind your actions.
7. **Consistency:** God is in perfect agreement with Himself, never requiring contradictions or impossibilities from you.

8. **Unchanging:** He is constant and unchangeable. He does not delight in one thing today and something contrary tomorrow, nor does He favour one person this year only to grow weary of them the next.
9. **Merciful:** God is merciful and does not require you to harm yourself to please Him. In fact, He is pleased only by what promotes your happiness, and He is displeased by what harms you or others, like a father displeased when his children hurt or defile themselves.
10. **Gentle Judgement:** Though He judges truthfully, He is gentle in His judgements, never unjustly harsh or exaggerating your faults.
11. **Free from Human Passions:** God is not swayed by the passions that blind human judgement and lead to injustice.
12. **Not Deceived by Lies:** He cannot be influenced by tale-bearers, whisperers, or false accusers, nor can He be misled by misinformation.

The Benefits of Seeking to Please God

Consider also the benefits of making it your aim to please God.

1. **True Happiness:** Pleasing God is itself your happiness—the source of pure, full, and constant comfort, always within reach, which no one can take from you. In achieving this, you reach the

very purpose of life; nothing more can be added except the perfection of this joy, which is heaven itself.

2. **Freedom from Vexation:** You will escape countless disappointments and frustrations that torment man-pleasers and fill their lives with unprofitable sorrows.
3. **Right Focus:** Pleasing God will guide and direct your cares, desires, thoughts, and labours towards their rightful end. It will prevent you from wasting them in sin and vanity, chasing after worldly concerns.
4. **A Sweet and Easy Life:** It will make your life not only divine but also sweet and easy, as you will care little for human censure, which would otherwise cause prejudice and difficulties. While others glory in wit, wealth, and strength, you will glory in knowing the Lord (Jeremiah 9:23-24).
5. **A Life of Dignity:** As God is above man, your heart and life will be ennobled by giving due respect to God and rejecting an inordinate concern for man's opinions. This is truly walking with God.
6. **The Sum of All Graces:** The sincere desire to please God and the contentment you find in this pursuit contain the essence of all graces—faith, humility, love, holy desire, trust, and the fear of God are all united in this. You “sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and make him your fear, and your dread, and your sanctuary” (Isaiah 8:13-14).
7. **Favour with Men:** If human approval is beneficial and worth having, this is the best way to achieve it, for God controls it. "When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies

to be at peace with him" (Proverbs 16:7). God may do this by calming their anger, restraining them from evil, or even turning their harmful intentions into good for you.

Signs of Living to Please God

See, therefore, that you live seeking God's approval as your chief goal, and let it suffice you. You may recognize this in yourself by these signs:

1. **Desire to Understand Scripture:** You will be most careful to understand the Scriptures, seeking to know what pleases and displeases God.
2. **Priority in Duties:** In fulfilling every duty, you will be more concerned with how it pleases God than how it pleases men.
3. **Attention to the Heart:** You will not only focus on your actions but also on your heart—your intentions, thoughts, and the inward manner and degree in which you do things.
4. **Private and Public Duties:** You will give attention to secret duties, those unseen by others, just as much as to public duties. You will be as concerned with what men do not see as with what they do.
5. **Reverence for Conscience:** You will respect your conscience, regularly examining it. You will not dismiss its voice—when it

tells you of God's displeasure, it will trouble you, and when it assures you of His approval, it will comfort you.

6. Charitable Pleasing of Men: Your desire to please others will be charitable, aimed at their good and motivated by piety, seeking to please God through it. It will not be driven by pride or ambition for your own honour, nor will it be impious in opposition to pleasing God.

7. Indifference to Human Judgement: Whether men are pleased or displeased, however they judge you or whatever they call you, it will seem of little consequence in comparison to God's judgement. You do not live by their opinions. You can endure their displeasure, criticisms, and reproaches if only God is pleased.

These are the signs that will show you are living to please God.

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