

JESUS FREES US FROM THE NEED FOR APPROVAL

YEAR: UNITE / FOCUS: LIVING IN FREEDOM
SERIES: GALATIANS

BIG TRUTH: JESUS FREES US FROM THE NEED FOR APPROVAL

1 Thessalonians 2:4; Romans 2:29; 1 Corinthians 10:33; Ephesians 6:6

BIBLE VERSE: GALATIANS 1:10; 2:4-6

“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

“Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me.”

BIG IDEAS

- Apart from Jesus, we live for the approval of others.
- Jesus sets us free from approval by giving us a new identity.
- Servants of Jesus live for God’s approval.

BIBLE PASSAGE: GALATIANS 1:11-2:14

UNITE: LIVING IN FREEDOM

The Unite year is an exploration of what it means to be united in Christ as the family of God (Romans 12:5). When we are saved, we are brought into the family of God—seen throughout the Old Testament as “God’s People” and in the New Testament and today as the church (Exodus 6:7; Colossians 1:18). We are set free from our sin to walk in freedom in Christ (Galatians 5:1) and use our influence to call others to do the same.

SERIES AIMS



Every student should know...

- True freedom is only found in being a servant of Jesus
- We are set free not to do whatever we want, but to live for Christ



Every student should feel...

- Grateful for Christ who sets us free
- Convicted of the ways that they are ruled by the desires of their flesh
- Responsible to use their influence to make much of God alone



Every student should strive to...

- Read through the book of Galatians each week
- Memorize the Bible verse each week
- Deny the desires of their flesh to walk in step with the Spirit



Every student should want...

- See the ways that they are tempted to pursue self-salvation, and repent of these
- Live for the approval of God, not others
- Help others move out of slavery to sin toward freedom in Christ

GUIDES AND WORKOUTS

The Guide provides a commentary page on each week’s Bible verse and on each Big Idea that unpacks the Big Truth. Each week also includes a Student Workout as a resource to help the student pursue spiritual disciplines on their own. Additionally, each week has a Family Workout that helps equip parents and guardians to have spiritual conversations with their student.



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Servants of Christ no longer need the approval of man.

“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

- When we are walking in darkness, enslaved by our sin nature, we need the approval of our fellow man. We are held captive by the opinions of others because this life is all we have. Once we are redeemed out of this life, we are freed from the need of this approval.
- When we are freed from our sin nature, we no longer live for this world or follow our sinful natures. Instead, we are servants of Christ, and this means we no longer need the approval of others. We have the approval of Christ and that is enough.

False teachers can lead followers of Christ back into a need for man’s approval.

“Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment...”

- When false teachers teach or preach something that adds anything to the gospel, they threaten to enslave people again. In these verses, Paul writes of this real threat that is present from within the church. False teachers can lead people to give in to the temptation to need approval.
- Because of our freedom in Christ, believers do not need this approval. We are approved by God because of the work of Christ on the cross. We can resist the false teaching and our flesh that desires approval and continue serving Christ.

Believers can resist even those who seem influential because of their approval in Christ.

“And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me.”

- Even within the church, there will be people who seem influential and the temptation to seek their approval will be present. Believers can resist this temptation because of the approval we have in Christ. Only Christ’s approval is necessary.

JESUS FREES US FROM THE NEED FOR APPROVAL

BIG IDEA #1: APART FROM JESUS, WE LIVE FOR THE APPROVAL OF OTHERS.¹

[THIS]

In Galatians 1:11-12, Paul speaks of the gospel of Jesus that he received on the road to Damascus. He makes a distinction between the gospel of man and the gospel of Jesus, pointing out that they are two different things. The gospel Paul is preaching is Christ's gospel, the true gospel. Because Paul is preaching the true gospel, he does not need the approval of man because He is redeemed in Christ. When we live apart from Jesus, we will seek the approval of others because this is our flesh nature. Prior to a relationship with Jesus, it is our sin nature to need approval because we are broken and fallen. It is our brokenness that needs approval. Deep within us, we know that we are in need of approval that we are lacking. While we are living in our flesh, we are seeking the approval of man and the world as we live for the world, following the desires of our sinful hearts. It may not seem like we want approval, but everything we do never satisfies or fully brings us the joy we are seeking. Paul reminds the Galatians that the gospel of Jesus fulfills and satisfies because it brings approval.

[THEREFORE]

How have you experienced the temptation to seek approval in your daily life?

Proverbs 29:25 reminds us of the snare seeking the approval of man can be in our daily lives. The desire to be welcomed and liked can lead us to seek the approval of others. Peer pressure and the desire to be a part of a group can lead us to want others to approve us. These are temptations.

[THIS]

In Galatians 2:1-14, Paul speaks of the ministry he did in Jerusalem and the way in which he sought the approval of Christ and not others. When we are abiding in Christ, we will grow in our understanding of our redemption and the approval we have through Him. We will understand that we do not need the approval of anyone else because we have been redeemed by God through Christ. Any time we seek the approval of anyone, we are living according to our flesh and not according to the Spirit. As Paul notes in Galatians 2:4, there will be people who seek to distract us and draw us away from our focus on Christ. Even within the church there will be people who desire others to seek their approval because they want position and authority that isn't theirs to have. When we keep our eyes focused on Christ and we fill our hearts with God's truth, we will not need the approval of others. We will be satisfied with the approval we have in Christ.

[THEREFORE]

Why do we often fear the disapproval of our friends or family even if we are seeking to walk in obedience to God?

Often, we place greater value on the opinions of our friends and family than we do the truth of God's Word. When we do this, the approval of men becomes a snare for us. John 12:43 also teaches us that we can seek the glory of man and the praise that man can give rather than choosing a quiet obedience to God. This can lead us away from walking in obedience to God.

What hope does it give you knowing you do not need the approval of man?

Proverbs 16:7 and 1 Corinthians 10:31 teach us together that seeking God's glory helps us obey Him which leads to His approval.

1. Galatians 2:13: Barnabas was led astray from the teaching by the need for approval. When we are living apart from the truth of Christ, we will succumb to the need for approval.

JESUS FREES US FROM THE NEED FOR APPROVAL

BIG IDEA #2: JESUS SETS US FREE FROM APPROVAL BY GIVING US A NEW IDENTITY.²

[THIS]

In Galatians 1:13, Paul speaks of his former life prior to his experience with Jesus on the road to Damascus. His description of himself is that of a violent persecutor of the church who tried to destroy it. Paul's former life and his actions were notorious to the early Christians. By the time he made it to Jerusalem, many of the early believers were astounded at his transformation and some were even a little skeptical. To say that Paul could have easily given in to the temptation to please these people for the sake of gaining their approval would be an understatement. The leaders of the Jerusalem church were well known leaders, and their words and actions carried a lot of weight with the early church. Even James, Jesus' half-brother was among them. They were so influential that even Barnabas was persuaded by them and their insistence that Gentile believers must also be circumcised. Paul held fast to the gospel of Jesus Christ, refusing to give in to this false gospel for the sake of gaining their approval. Though he was already an outsider because of his previous life, he held fast to the truth of the gospel and maintained that only faith in Jesus was necessary for forgiveness of sins.

[THEREFORE]

How does faith in Christ help you stand firmly on the truth of God's Word?

God's Word brings confidence and an increase in our faith in Him. Colossians 2:2-3 shows us that we grow in strength when we grow in our knowledge of Jesus through knowing His Word. Our faith in Christ helps us stand firmly when we do not fear others but trust in Jesus alone.

[THIS]

When we are made new in Christ, we are free to live for Him. We receive a new heart and mind to live for Him. We are no longer enslaved to the way of this world. We are awakened by the Holy Spirit to live for Jesus. Galatians 1:21-29 shows us that prior to knowing Christ, we are hostile to Him. Once we do know Him, we are filled up with a knowledge of Him and this understanding leads to wisdom. Because we receive a new identity in Him, we can live for Him in obedience. Our growth is shown by our bearing the fruit of the Spirit. When we bear the fruit of the Spirit, this will lead us to reject the need for approval of others or the world. Instead, we will desire to please God and God alone. His approval will be what matters to us. Galatians 2:6-7 also teaches us to walk in the faith that we have received, which means to take on the new identity that we receive. We should be rooted and grounded in this identity and when we are, we do not need the approval of others.

[THEREFORE]

What habits can you establish to help you ground yourself in your new identity in Christ?

James 1:21 teaches us to put away filthiness and to receive the implanted word of God. These two actions can become habits that help us establish our new identities in Christ. When we put off the world and take in a steady diet of God's Word, we will become more and more like Christ.

How can understanding your identity in Christ help you resist seeking the approval of others?

When we understand who we are in Christ, our motive is to seek His approval. 2 Timothy 2:15 shows us that our goal should be to grow in a knowledge of Him.

2. Galatians 1:23: Paul received a new identity when he was redeemed by Jesus. Jesus' approval brings with it freedom from our old way of life.

JESUS FREES US FROM THE NEED FOR APPROVAL

BIG IDEA #3: SERVANTS OF JESUS LIVE FOR GOD'S APPROVAL.³

[THIS]

In Galatians 2:1-14, Paul writes of his experience in Jerusalem. He tells of the “false brothers” that came in, seeking to impose regulations on the Gentile believers that would have added to the gospel. Instead of giving in to their demands, Paul stood strong, refusing to yield in order that the true gospel may be preserved. He did not compromise to popular belief in order to gain the approval of men, rather he understood and held fast to the sufficiency of the gospel. Only the true teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ should be preserved, and Paul was willing to stand firm because he lived to serve God, and therefore he lived only for God's approval.

[THEREFORE]

Why is it challenging to live for only God's approval?

In our flesh we desire to glorify ourselves. We want others to approve of us and to affirm us because we desire to be known and to have others make much of us. Romans 12:3-8 helps us keep a right view of ourselves and reminds us to not think more of ourselves than we should.

Where are you most tempted to compromise in order to gain approval from others?

To compromise means to accept a lower standard. In our Christian walk, we may be tempted to compromise in order to avoid the cost of truly following Jesus, or in order to soften hard truths so that others will be more accepting. Both of these are sinful. Paul reminds us in Galatians 1:7 that there is only one gospel, and we should take care not to distort it.

[THIS]

Paul continues his story of his time in Jerusalem in Galatians 2:6 with his encounter with those who seemed influential—the other apostles. Just as we may be tempted to act a certain way or speak a certain way so that others will like us, Paul may have been tempted here to try to get the other apostles to recognize his calling. Instead, he writes that it made no difference to him whether or not they were influential, because God shows no partiality. Regardless of who we are around, the message of the gospel does not change. Like Paul, we must remember that the grace that we have been given in Christ and our identity in Him does not change.

[THEREFORE]

How can you measure the influence of culture on your faith?

Paul's message to the Galatians is that salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Paul is committed to preach the message of the gospel of Christ, not whatever message is pleasing to man. In the same way, we should be committed to preach God's Word as it is commanded in 2 Timothy 4:1-5. If you have added to the message of the gospel, taken away from it, or neglected to preach it altogether, consider and repent of the effects that cultural influence has had on your beliefs.

Practically, how do we live each day for God's approval?

Hebrews 11:6 reminds us that without faith, it is impossible to please God, because whoever would draw near to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him. We live a life that is pleasing to God when we draw near to Him, seek to know Him more, and seek to be obedient to His commands.

3. Galatians 1:10: God's people seek His approval by serving Him and seeking to be like Him.