

Romans 14:18 For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.

So, what was the **big picture** that Paul brought us into in the last several weeks? What is the Satellite view? Remember it was the Kingdom of God. Paul brings us from the small issues to the big picture. He tells us that the decisions about what we eat or drink are not the big items, they are not the substance of our Christianity. The big things are all about the Kingdom of God and the realm of righteousness, peace and joy that we have been brought into.

I hope we have gotten this point. I hope we are not looking for any reason for divisiveness on small issues on which we have differences of opinions. I hope that we get this idea that **all of us who are believers** are all in this **family of believers** and this **family is a kingdom of which God is in charge**.

Now Paul moves on to tell us what the outcome of this kind of living is. He is basically saying, remember everything I have told you about **living in love for your brothers and sisters**. Remember what I told you about **how you should treat each other**, some of you with weak consciences and some of you with very well trained accurate ones. The rule of the day is that we should look out for each other's good. And if that means suspending some freedoms, so be it.

In today's text Paul tells us the outcome of that way of life.

First notice that he says that "He who serves Christ in these things". This isn't a new point. But I think we forget sometimes just how significant **what we do for each other really is**. Remember how Christ rewarded those who visited him in jail, and while sick, or when hungry? That was all just Christians ministering to other Christians. That is **significant stuff** in the Kingdom of God. Our society tends to elevate those who speak well or write good books. That only represents a small percentage of the gifts that God has divvied out to His children. But how we **treat each other**, that covers everyone. That is something we can **all** do. And doing it is a **service to Christ**. And that is significant.

Do you appreciate what Christ has done for you? Do you feel the urge to show Him your gratitude? Do you want to store up treasure in heaven? Do you want to know that you are pleasing Christ? Then serve your brothers and sisters. Love them. Do good to them. Look after them. These are the things that give significance to our days. In our text he is talking specifically about restricting our freedoms or accepting those with **greater freedoms than we have** without judgment. But in other texts this is expanded into every area of service.

Now what is the outcome of that service?

Our text says:

acceptable to God and approved by men.

I am not sure why the translators used the word acceptable here. The literal words translated from Greek mean Well Pleasing. And it seems to me that “well pleasing” captures what is being said here much better.

Here are some other places where this word is used.

[Phl 4:18 KJV] 18 But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things [which were sent] from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.

Here we have another example of what we are talking about. Paul received a gift that met his needs. He compares them to a sweet smell of an acceptable sacrifice **to Paul**? No, to God. And what does he say about this act? It is well pleasing to God.

Are you a believer? Do you feel like you never please God? Well, are you **serving fellow believers just because they are Christ’s children**? If you are, you need to adjust what you believe. You are believing a lie. If you are obeying Christ and doing acts of love to meet the needs of other believers, you are doing things that truly please God. Really. In a reality that you cannot see there is a God who takes pleasure in what you are doing. I think the devil uses the lie that God is so hard to please that we can never please him. It is very effective. Because over time, you know how you treat someone who is impossible to please. You quit trying. You figure, what’s the use. I can’t please this person. I might as well just please myself. That is our default position. And if we feel that we cannot please God by what we do, we can rest assured we will soon fall back to pleasing our flesh.

But it is not true that God is hard to please. When we are in Christ and our sin has been atoned for, we are in a position where we can easily please Christ. We just need to care about what he cares about and meet the needs we can see. God sees that like a sacrifice that smells good to Him. Do you realize you have that capacity? Christ has given it to you. What you do, **can**, figuratively, bring a smile to God’s face. Don’t we work so hard to bring a smile to people’s faces, often people who could care less about us. Doesn’t it make much more sense to do the things that will bring a smile to God’s face.

You can live a life well pleasing to Christ. This is true.

[Col 3:20 NKJV] 20 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.

This is a very important truth. There are times when I have been tempted to **back down** on this truth because there are parents that can make it very hard to obey them. But scripture does not allow us to change what it says because it is so difficult to comply.

Kids, do you want to bring a smile to God's face? Do you want to know you are doing the thing in any given moment that He wants you to do? Do you want to know what His will for you is?

Obey your parents in all things. Now obviously if they were to tell you to curse God, you should obey God rather than man. So the "all things" is in the context of those things that are in their right to tell you.

But I want you to notice something here. You don't need to fall into the trap that if you do this right you will automatically **please your parents**. You may. It will usually work that way. But it does not **always** produce that result. Maybe you have a parent that is difficult to please. Maybe their responses are unpredictable. Sometimes it will please them and sometimes it almost seems like your obedience displeases them. Or maybe no matter how much you obey them, they are never satisfied. All of those things could be true. But do you notice that the reason to obey your parents is not to please your parents? It would be nice if all obedience would please parents and all disobedience would displease them. But we are all fallen and our seemers are broken. Sometimes we respond just the opposite of what we should. That is sad, but it is true.

But what is written here transcends how our parents respond to us. Let me put it as clearly as I know how. **If you obey your parents due to your love for Christ, Christ will be pleased, even if your parents are not.** (repeat)

This is also true of wife's to husbands and employees to employers.

People in authority do not always make it easy to or even profitable to submit properly. Sometimes it may be positively reinforced. Sometimes it will be negatively reinforced. And sometimes it will go completely unnoticed by them. That is a fact in this sin filled life.

But the thing that makes it worthwhile is that it **ALWAYS** pleases Christ. Christ is like no one we have ever known. He has no moods that dictate His behavior. He doesn't have whims. He is not arbitrary. He does not lose his temper. What pleases Him today will please Him tomorrow. Our faithful acts of obedience when done in trust of His character will please Him every time.

So while our authorities may randomly reinforce our right behavior, Christ will always regard it the same way. That gives us fuel in our minds to do the right thing, even when doing the right thing doesn't seem to matter here and now. We cannot say, what difference will it make if I do the right thing or the wrong thing. The right thing will always please Christ.

So young Christian man or woman, do you really want to be well pleasing to Christ? It is not a mystery what he wants you to do. Obey your parents.

[Hbr 13:21 KJV] 21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom [be] glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Now, where does this well pleasing action come from? It comes from the work that God is doing in us. God is truly at work. And when we look at ourselves in the mirror every day we realize just how much work is left to do.

I like Brandon Heath's song, "He's not finished with me yet". It is very true. So when you are striving to do those things that are obedient and faithful, realize there are **two truths** at work. First, you are only striving to do these things because God has already done a work in you. And second, he will **empower your efforts** by His work in you. So you have help in that struggle. His working is present tense. It is ongoing. God wants to please Himself through you. His glory is what we are here for. And He will see to it that His people glorify Him.

So, obeying Christ by giving up our rights to our freedoms to look after the good of our brothers is well pleasing to God.

But it is also something else.

acceptable to God and approved by men.

Approved by men.

Now we really have to ask, "What does this mean?"

I grew up in an environment where I perceived that being a good Christian meant primarily being a person that presented a good image. I don't know how I picked that up. But I suspect it was because some of my teachers were preoccupied with how a Christian should **look** and did not focus enough on what a Christian should **be**.

I eventually picked up that pretending and living faithfully were mutually exclusive. A Christian, above any person on this planet, does not need to be fake. We do not need to present an image. We can be the most congruent people on the planet. And I think this text is emphasizing that truth.

Look here at how we will be approved by men. What have we been asked to do?

Put on a smile every day and be pleasant to everyone we meet?

No. We are told to love our brothers at our own personal expense. Christ told his disciples that the world will know that they are believers in Christ by the way they display their love for one another. The issue here is not **image**. It is not style. It is not presenting one's self with **the perfect salesman image**. It is about **substance**. It is about **being the same thing inside and out**.

The word for approved is very interesting.

The word has its origins in the making of coins back in Bible days. Back then coins were made by pouring them into a mold. When the coins were pulled out the person making them would shave off the rough edges. A coin was to be a certain size and weight. But some people would shave the metal off those coins in an effort to keep some of the metal for themselves and then sell it at a profit. In Athens I read that there were 18 laws created to prohibit the practice of skimming off this metal from coins. Well there were some money changers who would pay

no attention to this and they knew that by passing off these carved coins they were ripping people off. But there were others that would not do this. They would accept no coin that was not of the proper weight and size. These men were referred to as Dokimos- Acceptable. They were true. They were the real deal. If they represented something as being true, it was true. There was no hypocrisy. There was nothing not genuine.

Isn't it odd that the thing that wins acceptability **to man** is our putting our money where our mouth is **to each other**.

Fake and spin often impress at first, but it gets old very quickly. Most people have a radar that eventually picks out facades. No matter how hard we work at presenting an image, eventually people will see through it. And they have been lied to consistently. **True** has a sweet ring to a lot of people. It is the kind of thing that is attractive, that makes them want what we have.

I think it is significant to look at what **doesn't work**. Getting fixated on a bunch of legalisms, or being fixated on the controversial things that we are really allowed to do, is not going to have this same affect. The world isn't going to be impressed by the small print. They have seen enough of that as well. **They want to see true kingdom behavior**. Some will be impressed by true kingdom attitudes. They will want to see true righteousness, peace and joy.

Now, whenever I read about how the world regards us, I always take interest. Because it is really a mixed bag in scripture. Some verses you read in scripture would make you think that every person who does not know Christ is going to hate you. Some would give you the impression that if you are genuine they will all love you. It is one of those topics that you need to read in a broad context to get the full picture. We are going to finish the morning looking at that.

First let's look at how people regarded Christ.

Isaiah prophesied this about Christ.

[Isa 53:3 NKJV] 3 He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, [our] faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

[Luk 2:52 NKJV] 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Now, here is an apparent contradiction. Christ was despised and we did not esteem Him. Yet he increased in favor with men.

How could both of these be true?

First there is the perspective of time. At different times in a person's life he may be treated differently.

Then there is the perspective of spheres of life. For instance, a president might be loved for his personality and charisma and at the same time be hated for some of his political stands. To say that he was loved or hated would both be accurate. Third there is the perspective of different audiences. One audience might hate a movie and others would love it.

We cannot assume that every evaluation is from the same perspective or at the same period of time.

So in Christ's case, as he was growing up, the people around him were impressed with his virtues and character. Then later, as he was ministering, the religious *powers that be* rejected Him and slandered Him. The common people were turned against Him. And some, maybe many, were in the crowd yelling "crucify Him". So both are true.

Now let's see what scripture says about how the world will regard Christians.

[Jhn 15:18-20 NKJV] 18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before [it hated] you. 19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

We see here that Christ told us that the world would hate us. Does that mean that every single individual on this world will hate us? No. We see that those who are already believers are excluded from that group. We are like minded with them. But how about those that do not hate Christ? There will be some that the Holy Spirit is working on that will be drawn to us. They are not believers, but they are drawn to anything that looks like Christ.

Does this mean that every human that is not a believer and not being drawn to Christ will hate us? I don't think so, because Christ himself was not persecuted by everyone. It is likely that we will be hated by those who are religious folks who hate Christianity. That is who persecuted Christ and largely who persecuted his followers.

[1Ti 3:7 NKJV] 7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Here a person cannot be an elder unless he has a good testimony among those who are outside. I have heard this applied as if they must be liked by the community. But that is not really what it means. Technically it is a martyr's testimony, as Mike brought out when we went over this text. So they must have a testimony in the

world that they are a follower of Christ and willing to die for him. That is more in keeping with what we would expect.

[Luk 6:26 NKJV] 26 Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets.

Isn't this odd. Living like a true citizen of the kingdom of God will have us accepted by men we are told in our Romans text. But here we are told to look out if everyone is saying good things about us. I had stated in one of my songs that if a man has no enemies we know he has no home. This is what I meant.

The focus is on the idea that **you do not have enemies** where you **should** have enemies. If you love Christ those who radically hate Christ will hate you, even when you have done nothing to deserve it.

When I was in Youth For Christ we used to have the freedom to go into the lunch room to talk to kids we knew. I dreaded that like the plague. But I would normally go anyway. While I was sitting at a table one day talking to kids I knew, a girl came up to the table to speak to me.

She told me what a hateful person I was and what a hypocrite. She told me all the reasons I had for the things that I did. And she told me that she was a witch and what I stood for was offensive to her.

This person didn't know me from Adam, but she knew I was a Christian and she knew what my purpose was for being there. I think what Christ was telling his disciples was that if people like that don't hate you, you are doing something wrong. If those who are preaching a false gospel don't hate you, you are doing something wrong. If those who are violent to the cause of God don't hate you, you are doing something wrong.

As for that girl, I thought maybe it was a spiritual opportunity so I decided to walk over to her table and explain that she didn't know me well enough to attribute so many evil things to me. But if she wanted to truly discuss it I was open to it.

Within a week we were no longer allowed in the lunch rooms.

The false prophets were loved by those who hated what God had to say. That has never changed. If you are loved by the false spiritual leaders, you are in great danger of being false yourself.

[Jam 4:4 NKJV] 4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Semantics are important. Mike was always a stickler on that point. And anyone who knew him knew how carefully he used the word "friend". It was a sacred word to him. It was higher than brother. A friend is someone you can trust, someone around whom you can be yourself without reservation. Some rare person

who truly knows you and truly loves you. You can rely upon a friend and a friend can rely upon you. It is a reciprocal relationship, but it has no economy. You don't give something to get something. You give it because you want to give it and your friend is free to receive it.

Now, our culture, on the other hand has made the word "friend" obscene. With the advent of facebook people have racked up hundreds of friends. We use the word friend and associate interchangeably. A friend is someone that we know a little more about than we would know about a complete stranger. A friend is someone whose company we like. These are not good definitions. And because we have lost touch with the word we lose the meaning of this passage.

When we are friends with the world, we rely upon them to meet our needs. We confide in them our most needy selves. We make ourselves vulnerable to them. We ask them for direction in living our lives at the deepest levels. Can you see how that would be devastating to a believer? It would be like taking advice from the devil on how to live as a Christian. When we treat the world with that kind of trust and dependency we are giving to the world what should only be given to God and God's children. That is what this passage is really about.

So, what can we expect in this world? How should we regard non believers? How will they regard us?

Well, first, if someone is violently opposed to Christ, they will be violently opposed to us.

The gospel will either offend them or it will draw them, and some times it takes time to see what direction that will go.

We are not free to have relationships with the world where we place our soul in their hands for them to direct our paths. We should only do that with Christ and allow believers to help in that process.

But at the same time, there will be many people who like us. While we may not regard them as true friends, we may be the best friends those people will ever have. If you think about it, where else will they be loved without that person expecting something in return? Where else will people tell them what they really need to hear? Where else will people drop what they are doing because they know this opportunity to minister might be a divine appointment?

So it is very likely that worldly people will be drawn to us, if for no other reason just human self interest.

And when they do, should we cause them to reject us because they aren't supposed to love us? No. Not at all. We don't know that they aren't drawn to us because they are drawn to Christ. With those people we can just continue to voice what is true about us. We should be real with them about our devotion to Christ and **why** we are so devoted to Christ.

Normally things will go in one of two directions. Either that person will come to Christ or they will abandon us. The truth will either draw or repel. We just have to make sure not to hide the light under a basket. We have to make sure not to withhold the truth that comes to our mind to say when we are just explaining how we live and think and worship.

When I was in Youth for Christ this relational approach was called friendship evangelism. It is a shame. Because it really did harm to the word friendship. But it surely is relational evangelism. And that is a golden opportunity to proclaim the truth of Christ. If you have people like that in your life, non-believers who seem drawn to you, look and pray for opportunities. Show them hospitality. And be ever watchful for opportunities to glorify Christ in their presence. We have lots of open seats here at Ferndale.

[Phl 2:12-16 NKJV] 12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for [His] good pleasure. 14 Do all things without complaining and disputing, 15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation,

Without fault- that has been what we are talking about. Congruent people living in an incongruent world. It will get attention.

among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life,

This is what I was trying to say earlier. Believers will shine. They don't try. They can't help it. If we tell the truth about ourselves, the glory of our savior will shine through. And God is calling people from all over the place to Himself. Maybe the person drawn to us will be the next person to come to Christ. But we have got to hold fast to what God says like it is life itself. Because it is.

so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Paul closes this passage by telling his Philippian audience that their behavior will be his reason for rejoicing. If they do well, it will show that Paul's life was well spent.

We see from these passages how the world will regard us and we should regard them. Our behavior may have a very profound effect upon them. Sometimes it will cause them to hate us. Sometimes it will cause them to love us. Sometimes it will win their favor. Sometimes it will win their disfavor. Sometimes it will be appreciated. Sometimes it will be despised.

But the summary of the matter is that we should lay aside any freedom that would do someone harm. We should look out for their good. And by living in such a manner we will be a good representative of Christ in our world.
Is that how we are living?