

The Pleasure of God in Personal Obedience and Public Justice

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[0:00] Well, this morning we're covering chapter 9 of John Piper's book, the last chapter. It's on the pleasures of God, and it's the pleasure of God in personal obedience and public justice.

He's not a watering trough, and so he's self-replenishing, he's overflowing, he doesn't need a bucket brigade or a garden hose to fill him up.

Instead, he's always overflowing himself, and so we don't serve him as if he needed anything. And that's exactly what Paul said to the philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens.

He said he is not served, speaking of God, he is not served by human hands as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

So why did you wake up this morning? Why are you here right now? It's because God is giving to you, even right now giving you life. And so we don't serve him to give him something that he needs, because he doesn't need anything.

[1:22] Instead, we serve him in such a way that acknowledges that he is the giver and we are the recipients. We are needy, and he is gracious. And this is good news.

This is good news for us, because God rejoices in doing us good. And the way he wants us to serve him and love him and obey him, it emphasizes our neediness and his strength.

And so he helps those who wait on him. He delights in the prayers of the upright. And so whenever you are thirsty, you can come to him. Whenever you're needy, you can come to him, because he rejoices.

He delights in doing you good. And this is good news for another reason. And it's good news to know that we can please God.

We can please God. We can stir joy in God's heart. And that is phenomenal. That's grace. Because we don't deserve to be able to have that privilege.

[2:29] And we do. And so God doesn't get tired of us. He loves us. And our hope in his goodness gives him great delight.

And so when we hope in his overflowing grace, and him being an overflowing fountain, and when we give expression to that hope by prayer, we give him delight.

And so now in chapter 9, we're going to go a step further. That's sort of what we saw the last two weeks. This week we're going a step further and saying that obedience, obedience to God, makes this God-glorifying hope visible to the world.

And so God delights in it. Obedience makes our hope in the riches of God visible so that we can all see it. And so hope, by its nature, is invisible.

And prayer is generally in secret. And so you can't see those things. But obedience is visible.

Obedience is visible. And so obedience is this visible display of our faith in God's goodness, that he is a mountain spring.

[3:40] And he delights in our obedience. God delights in our hope and our faith. And he delights in our obedience because it gives a visible expression to that hope.

So today we're going to begin in 1 Samuel 15, verse 22. So let's turn there. 1 Samuel 15, verse 22. 1 Samuel 15, verse 22. But Samuel replied, Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much in obeying as in obeying the voice of the Lord?

The obvious answer is no. The Lord delights in obedience far more than he delights in burnt offerings without obedience. And the question is, why?

Why does God delight so much in obedience as opposed to worship without obedience? And that's kind of the question that we're going to be answering today. But before we do that, we want to see

the context of this verse.

[4:44] It didn't fall out of the sky on its own. It's in a context. So we want to see that before we go any further.

And so let's remember what the context is. Samuel is talking to Saul. Samuel's already anointed Saul king. And one of the first tasks that the Lord gave to Saul was to annihilate the Amalekites. And remember when the Israelites were going through the desert, the Amalekites had attacked Israel without cause, for no reason. And God told Moses to tell the people that when they've entered the land, remember what has happened.

And so judgment is coming for the Amalekites. And God delayed judgment for 400 some years. But as the years have passed, the time is now full, the appointed time has come, and the Lord commanded Saul to execute his judgment against them.

And you remember how things turned out. Saul and his army went in, they attacked the Amalekites, and Saul was victorious. But instead of completely annihilating the Amalekites, he kept the king, and he kept the livestock.

[6:02] And when the Lord saw Saul's disobedience, he sent Samuel to confront him. And that's what we have here. And so, to get the picture in your mind, imagine all this bleeding of sheep, lowing of cows, filling the air.

And Saul says, See, I have obeyed the Lord. And Samuel said, Then what's all this noise? And Saul says, Oh, the soldiers did it to sacrifice to the Lord your God.

It was the soldiers who did it, and they did it to sacrifice to the Lord. And then Samuel asked the words of our text, Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord?

So let's answer our question. Why does God delight in obedience? Why does God delight in our obedience? Five reasons.

And the first is this, That God has pleasure in obedience because disobedience shows a misplacement of fear. That's a lot of big words.

[7:13] And that's how all these are going to be, so I'm going to repeat this one. God has pleasure in obedience because disobedience shows a misplacement of fear. Disobedience shows a misplacement of fear.

Now look at verse 24. Then Saul said to Samuel, I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people, and so I gave in to them.

So why didn't Saul obey? It was because he was afraid of the people. He feared their displeasure more than God's displeasure, and so he disobeyed.

So disobedience is this insult to God. It's to fear something else more than to fear God. And the great biblical truth is that when you fear something, you're paying homage to it.

You're worshipping it. In Isaiah 8, God says, Do not call conspiracy all that this people call conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread, but the Lord of hosts.

[8:15] Him you shall regard as holy. Let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread.

Disobedience is fearing something more than God. It's pulling God off of His holy throne, and it's pride.

That might sound strange. Listen to Isaiah 51. The Lord says, Did you hear it?

Who are you that you should be afraid of men? Who do you think you are being afraid of men instead of me? That's pride.

Now let me ask you, why is the fear of man pride? Question for you. Why is the fear of man pride? Okay?

That's very good. The reason we fear men is because we want them to have a high opinion of ourselves, which is pride. Can you think of another reason? Yeah. Really, it's elevating the creation above the Creator.

[9:41] And it's pride, because guess what? You're part of that creation. It's elevating man above God, and you happen to be a man. And so you are thinking, man, me, other people like me, those are the people that we need to fear.

I need to fear. And not God. And so it's pride. And so God hates disobedience because it shows this misplacement of fear. But He delights in obedience because it shows that He is worthy of our fear.

He is worthy of our reverence. So why does God delight in obedience? That's the first reason. The second reason is this. God has pleasure in obedience because disobedience shows a misplacement of pleasure.

It's a misplacement of pleasure. Now, what was Saul's excuse for taking the animals? Do you remember what he said?

It was for sacrifice. It's for sacrifice. He said that a few times in the passage. We didn't read it all. It's for sacrifice. But the Lord gave Samuel insight into what was actually going on in Saul's heart.

[10:53] What was going on inside the soldiers' hearts and the people's hearts. So look at verse 19. Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?

Why did you pounce on the plunder? Pouncing on the plunder is hardly this pious, Oh Lord God, you're so worthy of obedience and we want to sacrifice to you.

That was not what was going on in the people's hearts. They wanted plunder and they pounced on it like a cat or like a bird swooping out of the air looking for food. They saw plunder and they wanted it.

And the same language is used in 1 Samuel 14 when the Israelites attacked the Philistines and the Israelites had this great victory and 14.32 says this, They pounced on the plunder and taking sheep and cattle and calves, they butchered them on the ground and ate them together with the blood. In both situations, it was the same motivation. We want to eat. We want food. And this is some really good food and so we're going to take it and eat it.

[12:06] And so their belly was their God and their pleasure was misplaced. Instead of fearing, loving, taking pleasure in God, they were loving and taking pleasure in food.

And so they thought the double cheeseburger was more important than having fellowship and obeying God. And so that's kind of like going to your parents' house on Christmas Day and opening all their presents, opening all your presents, eating all the food and ignoring them.

It's taking pleasure in things and instead of them. And it's an insult. And it shows you what, it shows what you really love.

And every time, and I mean every time we sin, we're making this trade. we're misplacing our pleasure. We're saying, God, I find this thing, this person, this idea, this food, whatever it is, to be more pleasurable than you.

And so I'm going to do it. Disobedience is a misplacement of pleasure. But obedience delights God. Because obedience shows, you know what, God, you are my chief pleasure.

[13:29] You're my highest treasure. There's nothing that I want in heaven and earth besides you. And so when we obey, we take pleasure in God. And God delights in that. He enjoys us taking pleasure in Him.

That's the first two reasons. Third, why does obedience please God? God has pleasure in obedience because disobedience shows a misplacement of praise.

It shows a misplacement of praise. So disobedience is a misplacement of fear, it's a misplacement of pleasure, and it's a misplacement of praise.

The first thing that Saul did after conquering the Amalekites was to build himself a monument. And it was a monument to himself. So the first thing he does, you can see it in verse 12.

Early in the morning, Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, and he was told, Saul has gone down to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal.

[14:40] So do you see why Saul's worship story? Saul's worship story just doesn't hold water. He didn't care about making a name for God.

When he did this, when he triumphed, it was about making a name for himself. It was all about his praise. And it becomes even more amazing.

Look at verses 16 and 17. Samuel said, Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel?

The Lord anointed you king over Israel, and he sent you on a mission, saying, go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites. Make war on them until you have wiped them out.

Why did you not obey the Lord?

We've been reading in Sunday morning about how Samuel anointed Saul. And remember how bewildered and amazed Saul was that he should be anointed king.

[15 : 46] Saul used to be amazed that God would choose him to be king, but now he has this insatiable lust for more honor. He wasn't satisfied with the honor that God gave him and the mission that God gave him.

He didn't find enough honor and praise and just obeying God. He wanted more, and he wanted it for himself. And so when it came, push came to shove, he said no to God's honor, and he said yes to his own honor.

He wanted a name for himself. And that is what goes on in our hearts every time we disobey. When we disobey, we're building our own kingdoms, aren't we?

We're saying, I want to carve out this little territory where my will is done. And it's not God's will. I'll sit on the throne. And every time we disobey, we're trying to make our kingdom that much bigger. We're trying to build monuments to our own honor and to our own glory. So you see the beauty of obedience then. Obedience is done out of a humble heart that wants to praise God.

[16 : 58] And so when we obey, we build a monument to God's glory. And we say, look, I've obeyed here. This is God's kingdom. A monument in the ancient world was to show that the king ruled here.

And so if you had this wide empire, the king obviously couldn't be in all places at all times. And so he would put a statue up to himself to say, I'm the king here and my laws still need to be obeyed. And so when we obey, we're putting a monument up in our lives and saying, this is God's territory. And God's law goes here. God has obeyed.

And we do it for his glory. And so the obedient, the humble heart says, you know what, whether I eat or drink or whatever I'm going to do, I'm going to do it for God's glory.

It's for God's kingdom. And so in obedience, we shine forth the glory of God. God, we show his greatness and our smallness.

[17 : 59] And it's a beautiful thing to obey. What would you think of a bridesmaid who decided that she was going to do what she wanted instead of what the bride wanted on her wedding day?

And so everything she did, she was trying to get people to pay attention to her instead of the bride. And you would say, you know what, she doesn't know her place.

She doesn't know what she's supposed to be doing. Who does she think she is? This wedding isn't about her. This is about the bride and the groom. And she's trying to make it about her, but it's not about her. And it becomes this ugly thing when we do that or when she does that.

And that's what we do when we disobey. This is God's day. It's God's glory. And we're saying, I'm taking it for myself.

But how beautiful is it when a bridesmaid and all of her other bridesmaids, when they do all that they can to honor the bride.

[19 : 09] And how wonderful it is to see them pointing to her and saying, look at her. She's gorgeous and they meld into the background and so all the attention can go on her. That's what obedience is.

It's melting in the background. It's humbling ourselves and doing what God wants. It's seeking our praise to come from God.

It's seeking all the praise to go to God. And so God sees it. He sees when our hearts go out and praise and we want Him to have the glory.

And He's pleased with it. Now fourth. We talked about the first three. Here's the fourth. God has pleasure and obedience because disobedience is like the sin of divination.

It's like the sin of divination. You see that in verse 23. This is the exact reason that Samuel gives in his response to Saul.

[20 : 12] For rebellion is like the sin of divination. Rebellion, that's disobedience, is like the sin of divination and arrogance is like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king.

Now, to make sure that we're all on the same page, what is divination? What is divination? What is that about? Hopefully you guys don't have a lot of experience in that.

But, what is it? Yes, Dennis. That's the perfect definition.

Yes. It's, it's trying to figure out what's going to happen in a way that ignores God's word. It's trying to figure out what's going to happen in a way that ignores God's word.

And, there were all sorts and all kinds of divination in the ancient world. Before a king would go to war, he would call in a diviner, a priest or something.

[21:13] And, these people would be specially trained. I mean, they had years of education to do what they did. And, you know, in some cases, you know, they would take a cow and they would sacrifice the cow and they would take the liver out and this priest, the diviner, would look at the liver and try to figure out by the liver what the king is supposed to do.

In the Roman Empire, pretty much every time the general had to make a decision about should we go to battle now, should we go to battle tomorrow, should we wait, should we march, they had to have a diviner come in.

And so, as you can imagine, it was a very good trade because if you told the person what he wanted to hear, you could make a lot of money and that's what happened. But, that's what divining is.

All kinds of different ways of doing it. But, they all had at the heart the same idea that we're going to figure out what we should do not based on God's word.

Now, let me ask you, why did Samuel say that rebellion is like divination? What's the connection? I mean, on the surface, they don't seem to be very much alike at all.

[22:24] But, but why is he, what's the comparison? Yeah.

Divination discounts the word of God. And, it's exactly what disobedience is. So, we go into the garden of Eden and the serpent is talking to Eve and he's saying, did God really say?

Did God really say? And, Eve doubted God's word. Eve wanted to know good and evil but she didn't want to know it through obedience. She wanted to know it on her own terms.

And so, she put herself above God's word and that's disobedience. So, you go to the doctor and the doctor diagnoses you with some infection.

He gives you an antibiotic and he says, take this three times a day. What does it say about you if you say, you know what, I'm only going to take it one time a day.

[23:29] You know, I want to save money. I really don't think that this medication needs to be taken three times a day. I'll just take it one time a day. What does it say about you? Well, it says, you think you are smarter than the doctor.

You don't trust the doctor. You think you're more trustworthy than the doctor is. You don't trust his skill. You don't trust his wisdom. You don't trust his goodwill. You think he has ulterior motives or something like that.

And, really, it's a big insult. And that's exactly what we do when we disobey. God says, do this and we say, you know what, I don't really think that needs to be done that way.

God, I really know what needs to be done in this situation. I know how this should be done. You don't understand. You're not as smart as I am. We never say these words.

But every time we disobey, that's what's going on in our hearts. Or, you know what, I don't think you mean good. I don't trust you. And that's what disobedience is like to God.

[24:33] Now, let me ask you for some feedback. When we obey God, what does that say about what we think about God? This isn't hard, but go.

Okay. We trust Him. He knows what we need. What else? It's not hard to come out.

Yes, Mark. Yeah. Yeah. I think doctors, on the most part, are worthy of our obedience because they have credentials. And God has credentials.

And He's worthy to be obeyed. Dale. We know He's right. Very good. What else?

What are we saying about God when we obey? And the reason I'm trying to get into this is because when push comes to shove and it becomes like this temptation to disobey, we need to have good reasons to obey.

[25:40] Don't we? We have to know what's at stake. What are we saying about God if we disobey? And what are we saying about God when we obey? Because we need to have these things in line if we're going to live to God's glory.

So what are we saying about God when we obey? I know. Yes, I lean. Okay, go on.

That's good. Right. So I think what I'm hearing is you're saying that when we obey, it shows that God is worthy of our sacrifice.

Even when it hurts us, He's worthy of obedience. Do you see what kind of glory that shines on God? I'm going to obey even when it hurts.

That's the fourth reason. Here's the fifth and the last. God has pleasure in obedience because disobedience is idolatry. We've already read it.

[26:49] rebellion is like the sin of divination and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. When God says one thing and then we consult the little wizard of wisdom in our own mind and then stubbornly and arrogantly refuse to do what He says and we go our own way, we become idolaters.

believers. So you can only consult your wisdom instead of God or when you consult your wisdom instead of God, you become guilty of divination. And then when you esteem your wisdom above God's wisdom, you now become guilty of idolatry.

You become guilty of idolatry and worst of all, your idol is yourself. And so you stand in front of the bedroom mirror and you get down on your hands and knees and you worship what you see.

Every time you disobey, you're falling down before yourself and saying, you are worthy. You are worthy to be praised. You are worthy to be honored. And this idolatry strikes at the very heart of who God is.

It attacks them at every point. And so disobedience shows, you know what? God, you're not worthy of fear. You're nobody. I'd rather fear man. And it elevates the pleasure that we have in sin and things and created things above God.

[28:19] And so we say, God, you know what? You're not enjoyable. You're not an enjoyable person to be around. And it seeks our fame instead of His. So we're building our kingdom.

We're building our monuments to ourselves. And it seeks guidance in addition to His word. And then finally, it just tears Him right off of His throne. or attempts to. And we worship our own human will.

But obedience is the exact opposite. Obedience is worship. In the Old Testament, one word for worship was serve.

Those words were used interchangeably. You can serve God. You can worship God. You can obey God. You can worship God. It's the heart of worship. And it openly shows that God has the greatest pleasure, that He's the most trustworthy, He's the one to fear, He is pleasurable, He is glorious, and therefore, God has great pleasure when we obey Him.

Because we join Him in His mission about what He is doing in this world. Remember, God, the purpose behind all of God's actions are He's trying to gain glory for Himself.

[29:31] He's trying to make a name for Himself in this world. And when we obey, we hold God's hand in doing this. We join God in His mission to glorify and enjoy Him forever.

And we take our place, we take our place in this glorious, divine dance. We take His hand, He leads, and we follow.

And as we do, He delights in our humility and in our submission. So brothers and sisters, do you want to see a smile on God's face?

Do you want to make God smile? Then hope in Him, pray to Him, and obey Him.

He's pleased when you obey. And I know that if you are a son or daughter of the King, then the same Spirit that was in Jesus Christ, the Spirit of Christ is in you.

[30:31] And the same heartbeat that motivated Jesus, I want to please my Father. It's beating in your own heart. And so you're saying, how can I please God?

It's this simple. It's not glamorous. It's obedience. It's humility before Him. And so His commands are not burdensome. They're gateways to His delight.

There's, when we see His commands, you should see them as, these are the ways that I can please God. They're like a menu. And all of these things are things that God is pleased with.

And so the world might rebel against Him, but He's won our hearts, and so we delight in Him. And we seek to obey Him. And that really should change the way we look at God's commands.

It's not a hard thing to obey. It's like opening the door on a buffet of enjoyments. Now, before we finish, we have one last point.

[31:36] And it's this. That God's pleasure and obedience is not just private. It's not just worked out in your life and in the way that you live personally.

It's worked out in public. His delight extends to public justice, to public obedience. and by public justice, I mean business.

I mean political justice. I'm talking about the rest of our lives, about filling up our gas tank and the food that we buy and who we vote for and how we do our banking, how we pay our taxes.

All of that public life. God is delighted. He's pleased when we follow a path of justice and righteousness. Proverbs 11.1 says this, The Lord of whores he detests.

He hates dishonest scales. But accurate weights are his delight. God hates deceitful business. But he delights in honesty.

[32 : 44] And so God's concern, God's love, God's delight and our obedience isn't just our personal private lives. It's how we live and what goes on in the world.

And so this is a little bit different of an idea. The Lord of whores, dishonesty, and injustice in the public square. And so his people, we, should be on the front lines of people who are fighting for justice and righteousness.

For honesty. I saw a sermon series called Peace, Justice, and Jesus. War, poverty, the environment, and other issues too important to leave the liberals.

Too important to leave the liberals. And I think that's a good description of what we're talking about. It's those kind of public issues. They're too important to leave the liberals.

See, when liberals do Christianity, they've got, they just, they've chunked all the supernatural. They don't have a supernatural salvation, and so they're left with these public issues.

[33 : 58] And so all they care about is public justice and public righteousness. But, I'll tell you what, if we don't care about those things, then it really shows a lack of love for the people that we are trying to reach with the gospel.

And it shows our blindness to the way that Jesus did ministry. Jesus was not just a preacher.

He was a healer. He was someone who loved people in tangible physical ways. and for too long, evangelicals have just ignored those things to a large extent.

And so it's no wonder that we have so little clout in the public square. Because we don't, we haven't thought about it. We haven't pursued it. But God cares about public justice.

And His delight is in honest scales. And there are such things as systemic sins. of whole systems of sin that are in culture.

[35 : 14] So think of slavery in the South. It's this whole culture of unrighteousness. And think of segregation. It's a whole system of unrighteousness.

And so today there's ways of doing business. There's ways of treating people that are unjust, that are unrighteous, and God abhors it. But God delights in people who make bold stands for public righteousness.

And so are you getting tired of abortion, the abortion debate? And I say this to my own shame.

Have we settled in and said, you know what, we can't do it. There's no point in fighting. This is where we are. We can't win this debate. Or are we saying we can't give in on this one.

We can't stop fighting. We need to find some way of finding new energy in God. Why? Because God hates abortion. He hates it.

[36 : 19] And we must too. And so no matter how long it takes, no matter how difficult it is, we cannot give up. And we can't settle in. I mean, Christ is coming back.

And is he going to find us saying, you know what, it was too hard and so we gave up and we were waiting for you? Or is he going to find us fighting for what he thinks is important? Is he going to find us when he comes back fighting against us not giving up?

Not settling in when injustice is reigning? Well, we need to learn from William Wilberforce who for 30, almost 40 years fought against slavery and England.

Now, on February 23rd in 1807, the House of Commons passed the Slave Trade Act and officially and it finally ended the trafficking of men, of people, on British vessels.

And so, it was the law that choked slavery out of the British Empire. And so, merchants were forced to give up their trade. And they did it unwillingly, they didn't want to, they did it under constraint, and it wasn't for any holy reason at all.

[37 : 32] But that act was a work of God's grace. And God rejoiced in it. He rejoiced most of all in William Wilberforce and Henry Thornton, these two architects of this bill, when after the law was passed, they ran outside and it was snowing just like this, and they were frolicking outside of the chamber.

They were so happy. But in a different way, God was delighted in the shell of holiness that took shape in the British Empire when the slave trade was purged from England.

Because he delights in the work of his hands. And that was something that he did. Whenever there's any sort of justice in our sin-cursed, sin-sick world, then it's obviously God at work.

And he delights in his work. So the point of all this is simply this. Don't give up obeying God. Find new vigor, because when you do, it's not a slave-master- slave relationship.

It's not that he takes no pleasure in your obedience. You're his child, and when he sees you obeying, he delights in you. And so don't give up obeying God publicly.
[38:54] And privately, God rejoices in our obedience. And so let's figure out more ways to obey God in our lives privately. And to find ways of working righteousness in this world publicly.
And as we do that, God smiles. And he's pleased with it. Well, our time's up. We're dismissed. may
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