

# Pleasing God (part 2)

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[0:00] We're in the second week of a lesson on pleasing God. Last week we considered whether or not pleasing God is even possible, with the emphatic conclusion being yes, for at least two reasons.

! One, God is pleased in His own Son. Christ came to redeem His people by becoming a sin offering for them. We read in Mark 1.11, seeing God's pleasure with that sin offering, a voice came from heaven, You are my Son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased.

So since God is delighted in His Son, He's delighted in all those who have been appropriated by God through Him. But then secondly, we are able to please God because God is pleased in His own works.

Ephesians 2 we read, But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

It is by grace you have been saved. And then in Hebrews 12, the familiar passage, Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

[1:17] It is God who works out His salvation. He is the author of our faith. He is the one that is perfecting that faith. And therefore, since He is doing that work in us, He is pleased with that work.

So since we are able to please God, we next considered that we are commanded to please God. And we saw Jesus as our example.

We're Him speaking. He said, By myself I can do nothing. I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just. For I seek not to please myself, but Him who sent me.

And then Paul's commands to us, both in the Ephesians and to the Corinthians, he commands, Find out what pleases the Lord. So we make it our goal to please Him.

Well, if we are able to please God, if it's possible, and we're commanded to please God, we then must ask, How do I please God?

[2:22] And that is where we launched and broke off last week. And we considered last week the first three ways in which we can please God. One, by being crushed and broken in spirit.

Two, by doing nothing on my own. And three, resting fully on His power and strength. So how do we please God? Fourthly, by looking to the Lord in everything.

By looking to the Lord in everything. Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. The opposite of trusting God is looking to the proud, which, of course, so often is ourselves, isn't it?

But the opposite of looking to the proud is looking to Jesus. Look unto me, and be ye saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no one else.

How much do I consciously look to Jesus for His justifying work on my behalf? Well, I first have to recognize that nothing I can or ever could do will merit anything unless I'm first under the shadow of the cross.

[3:37] Unless I sit myself under Him and see that everything, all my works, are nothing but filthy rags unless the blood of Christ flows down upon me.

I often wonder, as we consider the subject of pleasing God, how often, as I'm doing my tainted works, do I consciously put myself under that cross and think and see Him above me and see that blood flowing down upon me and realizing that it is because of that blood that I am acceptable to God.

In my mind's eye, picturing myself beneath that cross. Scripture uses several other words that expresses this idea of looking. For the sake of our study, I'm going to consider them together.

So our next point is that I please God by trusting, hoping, fearing, and waiting on Him explicitly. Three passages along this front. First, Hebrews 11, 6.

Without faith, it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

[4:50] This familiar passage ties faith to pleasing God. If I don't have faith, it's impossible to please God. If I do have faith, which will be manifested by earnestly seeking Him, then I will reap His reward.

And what greater reward is there than to have the pleasure of God upon my life? Well, there's probably no other passage I personally use more in my struggle against the sin of pride than Psalm 147, 10, and 11.

His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor His delight in the legs of a man. The Lord delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love.

As I feel pride welling up within me, I can be certain that the arm of the flesh is involved. Whether I'm focusing on my accomplishments, my beauty, my mental prowess, my quickness of foot, or any other self-deluded ability.

But whether or not the abilities are real or imagined, it doesn't matter because God's not impressed. This verse gives me a good whack across the head to wake me up to the mind of God.

[6:02] He takes no pleasure in anything found in myself. Often this verse will begin running through my mind as I'm in mid-sentence describing something I've done in some self-cleverly concealed pride.

Does knowing what God does and doesn't please Him make a difference in our war against the flesh? Well, for the believer, the love of Christ should constrain us.

If it doesn't, there's something very seriously wrong. Such knowledge of what pleases our God should be one of the most powerful weapons in our arsenal against sin. And then Psalm 37.

Please turn there. Psalm 37, beginning with verse 3. Psalm 37, 3. Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord. Trust in Him, and He will do this. He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

[7:09] Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath.

Do not fret. It leads only to evil. For evil men will be cut off, but those whose hope is in the Lord will inherit the land. Jump down to verse 23.

If the Lord delights in a man's way, He makes his steps firm. Though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand.

Waits a common Old Testament word that is frequently used to describe this concept of trust and faith. A few years ago, as I was struggling for nine months to find employment, I readily agreed with God that I needed to trust in Him.

I needed to have faith to believe that everything, He was working it all out for my good and for His glory. But there was no word that more vividly spoke to what I needed to do than this one.

[8:14] Wait patiently for Him. He's coming in perfect timing. I need to just wait for Him. And as I wait, again, the recognition and all the pain and all the frustration and all the battle with the flesh that He is looking down on me and smiling because He has given me that ability to wait and He's pleased with those who will trust in Him, with those who will wait upon Him.

But this command isn't just for the big things of life. As I'm late for an appointment and I'm stopped by a red light, God reminds me that I need to just wait for Him.

What's the motive to wait or to trust in the Lord? Again, the knowledge that He is pleased with His weak child who casts Himself fully on Him. Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you.

He will never let the righteous fall. So according to Psalm 37, what kind of way is it that the Lord delights in? Well, it's a way that trusts in the Lord, a way that delights in the Lord, a way that waits patiently for the Lord, and a way that hopes in the Lord.

Well, this kind of way will necessarily express itself in quiet submission to God's fatherly discipline.

So the next point is that I please God by submitting to the Lord's discipline in the love of Christ.

[9:45] By submitting to the Lord's discipline in the love of Christ. Listen to Proverbs 3, 11 and 12.

My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent His rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those He loves as a father the son He delights in.

Picture with me a tyrannical parent. He never talks with his children. He never spends any time with them. He never seeks to learn of their joys or needs.

Only thing they hear from his mouth are his rebukes and barking out orders their way. Now picture a gentle parent, one who does work and play along the side of his kids, who spends time listening to them and praying for them.

And now let's say that a son is about to make the biggest mistake of his life. And it will take some stern discipline to keep him from making such a great error. Which father would the son most likely listen to and submit himself to?

Well, obviously the latter one. Why? Because overarching everything the good father says and does is a sense that that son has of his love for him.

[10:55] His father's stern rebuke is tempered by a knowledge that he loves him. Turn to Ephesians 3.17. Ephesians 3.17.

Just how important is a confident knowledge of another's unwavering love for you really worth? For many years I was confused by 2 Corinthians 5.14 which says, For the love of Christ constraineth us.

In the old King James Version. For the love of Christ constraineth us. I felt like the passage should have read, My love for Christ constraineth me. If I love Christ, then I want to serve him.

How does his love constrain me? It just doesn't seem to add up. But my immaturity couldn't grasp such a concept.

From my experience, all motivation had started from within me and flowed outward. But then we come to Ephesians 3, beginning in verse 17. And we see that there is a much deeper motivation of which scripture speaks.

[12:04] And it is the knowledge of another's unconditional love for me. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

And to know this love that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. While it's true that Christ's love will solicit a response of love in those whom he has set his affection on, we love because he first loved us, nevertheless, this is not the primary emphasis of Ephesians 3.

Rather, Paul is concerned that all the saints would grasp the love of Christ. Why? Because knowing and experiencing that love will carry the believer through every moment of their lives.

When I'm under some trial or discipline, the reality that gets me through is that Christ loves me. And every circumstance he brings into my life is in the context of that love.

Listen to Romans 8, 35 and 37. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

[13:22] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Christ's love began and is rooted in his finished work on behalf of his people, without which there would be no love of God for any human being.

But we mustn't stop there. To do so is to make Christ's righteousness and justification an academic reality that one coldly appropriates without any relational impact on us.

Is this not what is wrong with much of the church, even the evangelical church today? We've somehow invented a Christianity that embraces every doctrinal truth of scripture, but is nonetheless dead.

It is not relational. Is this not what Christ himself warned the church against in Revelation? To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, I love your deeds.

I'm sorry, I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false.

[14:31] You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary. This is a good church. Yet, I hold this against you.

You have forsaken your first love. Is your heart warmed by the thought of the love of God for you? Do you cry out, Abba, Father, to your king?

Is the reality of God's pleasure for you what fuels the fire that sustains you hour by hour? If it is, it will sustain you during the good times and the bad.

To rejoice in his blessings, but also to be able to thank him for his discipline and his trials. Another way in which we please God is by praying and pursuing righteousness.

Turn to Proverbs 15.8. Proverbs 15.8. While I could have considered the subjects of prayer and the pursuit of righteousness separately, I am taking them together because they are found together in this passage.

[15:41] We just considered how the love of God is interconnected with this idea of pleasing God. God is pleased with those whom he loves.

He loves those who please him. Notice how these ideas are connected in Proverbs 15. Starting in verse 8, The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him.

The Lord detests the way of the wicked, but he loves those who pursue righteousness. I'm presently going through Proverbs with some of my children, and in so doing, we always begin by noticing parallelism in the Hebrew poetry.

There is one of my children likes to say, what's the paralysis in this passage? What are the parallel thoughts in Proverbs 15.8.9?

Help me. What are the parallel thoughts in these two verses? Sacrifice and prayer. Okay.

[16:46] Detests and pleases. What if you take verse 8 and verse 9 and look at parallels between the two of those two verses? Okay. Sacrifice of the wicked and the way of the wicked.

One more. What's paralleled with the prayer of the upright? Pursues righteousness. Prayer of the upright and pursues righteousness.

And then we also see pleases and loves. Matthew Henry comments on verse 8, God has such a love for upright good people that though they are not at the expense of a sacrifice, he himself has provided that, their prayer is a delight to him.

Praying graces are his own gift and the work of his own spirit in them with which he is well pleased. He not only answers their prayers, he delights in their addresses to him and in doing them good.

If you are a child of God, being a benefactor of the sacrifice of his son on your behalf to give you a perfect standing before God the Father, do you want to delight him? Then address him in prayer.

[18:01] One of my children this week sat down next to me and just started sharing with me, just started talking with me, telling me what was going on in their life, what their interests were, and it delighted me.

Wow, they're talking to me. A parent delights to have fellowship with his children. The Lord delights to have his children come to him in prayer.

We mustn't be, I'm sorry, but prayer of the upright is paralleled with pursuing righteousness. The prayer of the upright is paralleled with pursuing righteousness. We mustn't be deceived into thinking that if we are having an ooey-gooey feeling with God, all is well with us.

Matthew Henry continues, the sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to God, not for want of some nice points of ceremony, but because their way, the whole course and tenor of their conversation is wicked and consequently an abomination to him.

Any supposed love for God is counterfeit if it is not accompanied by a thirst for righteousness.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

[19:18] But pursuing righteousness implies living according to his instructions and commands.

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

1 John 3, 21 and 22. Hear, O earth, I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes, because they have not listened to my words and have rejected my law.

Your burnt offerings are not acceptable. Your sacrifices do not please me. One of the ways we obey his commands and please him is by keeping the Sabbath.

Listen to Isaiah 58. If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on his holy day, if you call the Sabbath delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.

The mouth of the Lord has spoken. Again, in Isaiah 56, this is what the Lord says to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who chooses what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant.

[20:44] Keeping the Sabbath is choosing what pleases him. I recognize that there might be some here this morning that have never been presented with this message. At least you've never

considered it's possible application outside of national Israel.

If the keeping of the Sabbath is a new concept for you for the present age as it was for me at one time, while I don't have time this morning to prove its relevance and applicability, I would challenge you to pick up the book *Calling the Sabbath a Delight* by Walter Chantry.

And would you read through it and study it with an open heart and an open mind and a submission to God. My will and gods are diametrically opposed to one another.

As a result, in everything I do, I must choose to either please him or to please myself. It's really just that simple. And what one does with the Sabbath is held out by Scripture as a revealer of the heart. To summarize Isaiah 58, if I'm living to please myself, then I will do as I please on his holy day. But if I'm bent on pleasing, if I'm not bent, I'm sorry, if I am bent on pleasing God, then it will show in my Sabbath day activities.

[22:06] Next, we please God by being fully committed to him. By being fully committed to him. honoring and delighting in his holy day is just one expression of such a commitment.

For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. We have the picture here of God just looking around, looking everywhere, and he's looking for something.

What he's looking for is the one whose heart is fully committed to him. It's not good enough to be just mostly committed. We must be fully committed to our God.

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Husband or wife, would you be very pleased if your mate were only partially committed to you?

What if they were committed to you the vast majority of the time? I mean, what if only one night out of the year they committed themselves to someone else? If the other 364 days a year they were fully committed to you, would you be satisfied?

[23:17] Well, obviously we wouldn't. And yet, we think we can play around with the world, be idolatrous in our commitments, and be half-hearted, lukewarm, in our love for him until somehow be satisfied.

Well, the way in which our commitment to God can be measured is by the one whose approval we seek. And so, our next point, our last point on the vertical discussion of how we may please God is, I please God by not living for the approval and pleasure of man.

I please God by not living for the approval and the pleasure of man. Please turn to 1 Peter 3.13. 1 Peter 3.13. As you turn there, listen to Galatians 1.10.

Am I now trying to win the approval of men or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. My allegiance is determined by the one whose approval I seek.

It's easy to say that we're living for the pleasure or approval of God rather than the approval of man. But from time to time, God gently brings along his disciplining hand into our lives in the form of the rod of men.

[24:31] As we continue to do right rather than receiving their praise, we are falsely accused or just plain unappreciated. The harder we try, the more displeasure we must endure.

In the end, we become crushed, despondent, left wondering why we should even try. But it is precisely at this point that we can gauge our commitment to Christ.

It's difficult to measure the idolatrous place something has in our lives while we still possess it. Rather, it must first be taken from us before we can truly perceive the hold it has on us.

1 Peter 3, beginning in verse 13. Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.

Do not fear what they fear. Do not be frightened. But in your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord. the degree to which man's unjust displeasure leaves us broken in spirit is the degree to which we are not living for the pleasure of God.

[25:42] Man's displeasure can indeed bring us suffering. I'm not saying that. But as one suffers, the Christian rejoices in his spirit by understanding that he is still blessed of God and continues to be under his pleasure.

There's an old retort that was given as a response to an insult. Just consider the source. Well, if the displeasure is coming from one for whom I am longing and seeking approval and I consider that source, then I'm going to be emotionally crushed if I receive their disapproval.

How are we going to respond when God exposes to us an area in which we have been living? for the pleasure of man? Well, we find the answer in verse 15. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.

Here we have Christ again. We own up our idolatry and we again commit ourselves to him. We turn from our lust for man's approval and again set him up as Lord.

We again live for his pleasure and make that central in our life. You see, if Christ is truly set apart in our hearts as Lord, the unjust, harsh responses of men cannot crush us since we are in reality not working for them or working for God.

[27:05] Colossians 3, 23 and 24. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.

it is the Lord Christ you are serving. Well, there is so much more we could cover. We could consider that I please God by praising, thanking, rejoicing, and finding one's joy in him, by boasting in God, by doing all for the praise of the name of Jesus, and on, and on, and we could go.

But we must quickly turn our attention to the horizontal. We will not please God if our focus is purely vertical. It must also seek to live as Jesus did toward our fellow man, all the while doing so with the eye for his pleasure as our maker.

So how do I please God on the horizontal plane? Again, there is much we could consider, which we will not, such as by pursuing peace, by being merciful towards others, by living as a pilgrim in this world, by exposing the deeds of darkness, by giving generously.

I suppose we could take all of Scripture and keep going on and on in this area of how we can please God. But I have chosen four ways in which Scripture has highlighted how we bring pleasure to God through our actions towards others.

[28:30] First, we please God by living for the pleasure of others. Please turn to Titus 2.9. Wait a minute.

Am I not contradicting myself? We please God by living for the pleasure of others. Wasn't our last point on the vertical that we please God by not living for the pleasure of others?

Well, yes, but that negative command carried the idea of living for their approval, living to want them to think highly of us, to approve of what we do, living as if they are our master.

but Scripture uses much the same terminology, only it's meaning a very different thing and we see this in Titus 2.9. Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

far from being idolatrous and self-centered in motivation, this idea of living for the pleasure of others is so that in every way we will make the teaching about our God and Savior attractive.

[29:53] Our purpose for living for the pleasure of others is the glory of God and that again brings us back to the vertical focus that we are to have of doing all for His pleasure.

Listen to Romans 15, verse 1-3. We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good to build him up.

For even Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me. A holy, righteous, God-inspiring motive to please others has at its root the complete opposite of self-centeredness.

We do not live to please ourselves, but to please our neighbor. We live for the good of those whom God has placed around us. Our neighbor might be our brother, our sister, our parent, our child, employer, church member.

Anyone God puts around us is our neighbor. The point is that everything we do is to be done not to satisfy our own selfish desires, but for the good of our neighbor, to build them up through our good works.

[31:03] 1 Corinthians 10, 31-33. So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Yes, there it is. We do everything for the glory of God. But what's the next verse?

Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks, or the church of God, even as I try to please everybody in every way, for I am not seeking my own good, but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

Rather than living to please men being a contradiction to living for the glory of God, it is in fact an expression of it. Living for the glory of God will express itself in living for the good of those God has placed around me.

Finally, notice the ultimate good we should be seeking for others is their salvation in this passage. Well, closely tied to living to please others is doing all that I do for the good of others.

So, secondly, we please God by doing good to others. Hebrews 13, 16, and do not forget to do good and to share with others for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

[32:14] Colossians 1, 10, and we pray this in order that we may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way bearing fruit in every good work.

How do we please God in every way? By bearing fruit in every good work. Getting down to the nitty-gritty of life, how do I know which activities I'm to be doing in order to please God?

Well, I fear we've made this too complicated. It's more difficult than it needs to be. A common error that we often engage in, and I know I did it in my youth, is trying to divide up life's many activities into the spiritual and the unspiritual.

The spiritual might include engaging in our devotions, prayer, preparing for Sunday school, having family worship, attending church, and so on. Then there's the secular activities.

You know, those things that we do to live in this world, but which has limited eternal value. Things like changing diapers, making meals, working at secular jobs, going to school, helping the kids with their homework.

[33:23] But such divisions don't exist in Scripture. anything and everything we do is to be done for the glory of God. And that makes it imminently spiritual.

On the same token, as we've already seen, engaging in a supposed spiritual activity, such as prayer, while my secular life is being lived out in dishonesty or oppression, is an abomination to God.

This picture that Scripture paints presents every responsibility and duty that God brings into our lives as an opportunity to please Him. For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

He sends His sunshine on the wicked and the good. He brings life's little joys to us in a speakable number of ways, most of them being very, quote, secular.

He's involved in these secular physical activities because He is a good and a loving God. And we are His agents to bring good to those that He has put around us.

[34:37] He has prepared the good works in fact beforehand that we are to do. And what are those good works? We need to take our blinders off and just look around us.

Who has God put around me today? What good works can I be about in those people that He has put within my life today? That daily interruption, the thing that got you off track to keep you from being able to do what you were planning on doing that day, do we see that interruption as just another marching order from our God, a good work that He has put in our lives that we are now to be looking at how we can do?

Those three meals a day that you faithfully prepare for your family, that's just simply one small way that God is bringing good to that little band that He has put around us.

Well, thirdly, we please God by being honest and truthful. We please God by being honest and truthful. The Lord detests lying lips but He delights in men who are truthful.

The Lord abhors dishonest scales but accurate weights are His delight. Many of us may not be as prone to declaring out and out lies but we nonetheless can be deceitful in many ways.

[36:06] Whether we declare as fact things for which we don't have confident recollection, we exaggerate to make a point or bolster our argument, we pretend that we haven't heard someone when in fact we have to reduce our obligation, we plead forgetfulness to save face or avoid consequences.

How much of a premium do you set on telling the truth? In Revelation 21.8, we are told that all liars will have their place in the lake of fire.

God says He detests lying lips but on the flip side, He delights in men who are truthful. The next time you must do the hard right or even the small little act of the Spirit coming and prompting of saying that you did hear them or admitting that you did do something wrong, taking a responsibility, taking a consequence.

While there may be earthly consequences or added work, remember that those responses the Lord delights in. And again, as we live for the pleasure of God, that becomes a motivation that drives us to be truthful.

Well, fourthly and lastly, we please God by being faithful and blameless. This, of course, is closely tied to being honest and truthful. My eyes will be on the faithful in the land and that they may dwell with me.

[37 : 40] He whose walk is blameless will minister to me. The Lord detests men of perverse heart, but he delights in those whose ways are blameless.

These two words, faithful and blameless, are often found together because they're closely interrelated. A faithful man who can find. Being faithful is saying what you will do, and then doing what you have said.

Well, some think that if they never commit to anything, that they'll be faithful because then they won't ever have to go back on their word. But it doesn't work that way.

A faithful man is dependable. And by definition, being dependable means that you've made commitments for which people are depending upon you for. If you fail to do what you say, you are unfaithful and therefore blameworthy.

To be blameless, you must have also been faithful. We previously saw that God's eyes were on a certain type of man, the man whose heart was fully committed to him.

[38 : 49] Here we see the imagery again of God setting his eyes on certain types of persons. And that person is the man whose walk is faithful and blameless. Well, let us go out and seek to please the Lord this day.

You're dismissed. us.