

So What Exactly Does It Take to Please God?

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[0:00] Good morning. Please turn to 2 Corinthians 5.9. My wife wanted me to express her deep gratitude for all of the love she's been shown.

! She's been overwhelmed, and I thank you as well. The pastor asked how I've avoided the illness. We haven't done much kissing in our family of late.

I did let her kiss me on the back of my neck as I left this morning. We're studying Priolo's book, *Pleasing People*.

We made it through the first section, which dealt with how we are people pleasers. I'm wondering if someone could please just give me a summary.

Please keep it under 20 minutes. On what our problem is. What is our problem in our natural man as it relates to this context?

[1:07] Very good. Thinking more of others and how they think about us than of God. So that's our problem. We're now into the second section of the book, *God's Solution*.

And this morning our chapter is titled, *So What Exactly Does It Take to Please God?* As a people pleaser, we would often do whatever it took so that people were happy with us.

We lived for their smile. As a God-pleaser, we're to make it our ambition to please the Lord. Look at 2 Corinthians 5.9 and 10.

So we make it our ambition, or our goal, our aim, to please Him whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him, for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

What is ambition? The American Heritage Dictionary defines ambition as an eager or strong desire to achieve something such as fame or power.

[2:17] People can have an ambition to become a millionaire, become the CEO of a company, own a certain kind of car, become married and have 12 kids. Anybody have that ambition?

What's your ambition in life? Well, God tells us that a believer's ambition, that which he is seeking to achieve, is to please the Lord.

Priolo observes that a person with godly ambition has such a heartfelt determination to bring pleasure to God that it penetrates everything he does, every thought, every decision, every word, every attitude.

The word translated ambition, or goal, in 2 Corinthians 5.9 literally means love of honor. So for the people pleaser, their ambition, or their love of honor, drives them to earnestly strive to gain the honor of man, be it through accomplishments, wealth, or the position that we are put in.

The God-pleaser, on the other hand, while still driven by ambition, has as his aim the pleasure of God. And what are the consequences of where one's ambition is focused?

[3:32] Is it really that big of a deal anyway? Well, 2 Corinthians 5.10 answers that question, and it does so pretty pointedly. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

The stakes are infinitely higher than the petty ambitions we have in this life, becoming a millionaire or getting a promotion. It has to do with eternal life or eternal damnation.

Well, if it's our ambition to please the Lord, we're going to need to know how we gain his favor, what we must do to please him. And so we must learn what pleases the Lord.

Ephesians 5.8-10 says, You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light. For the fruit of light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth.

And find out what pleases the Lord. When I become a child of the light, I'm to be about the business of finding out what pleases my Lord and Savior.

[4:44] In this chapter, Lou Priolo is seeking to answer the question, What does it take to please the Lord? And we're going to consider six areas. The list is far from exhaustive.

I've already condensed it down from what he went through in the book because there was just too much material there to cover. And we probably could spend months on the subject. But six areas of seeking to answer the question, What does it take to please the Lord?

Please turn to Hebrews 11.5. Hebrews 11.5 and 6. We're going to begin with the foundation. The foundation, of course, is faith.

Pleasing God requires faith. That is our first point. Hebrews 11.5. By faith, Enoch was taken from this life so that he did not experience death.

He could not be found because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith, it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

[5:52] I'd like to answer five questions regarding faith. Five sub-points under what this one point of pleasing God requires faith. First, what faith is not.

Second, what it is. Third, where does faith come from. Why faith is needed. And lastly, how faith is used. So first, what faith is not.

Faith is not merely an intellectual assent that the God of the Bible is the one true God and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. It isn't even the mere understanding and believing that Christ died on the cross and paid the penalty for hell-deserving sinners.

The demons know all these things and they tremble. You believe that there is one God? You do well. Even the devils believe that and shudder, we're told in James 2.19. No, faith is much more. So what faith is? The Wessner households have used a catchphrase that I believe my brother coined many years ago that goes something like this. Faith is resting in God to the exclusion of trusting in self.

[6:58] He later revised it to say, faith is resting in God to the exclusion of self. God-pleasing faith is dependent faith, a faith that, as Priolo puts it, rests on the truth giver to make good his promises and it commits itself to following that truth.

Where does faith come from? That's the third sub-point. There is a popular belief within some Christian circles that our faith is self-generated. The reasoning goes that since I'm commanded to believe, faith must be something I contribute.

Faith is my response to that command. But what do the scriptures say? Ephesians 2.8 and 9, familiar passage, for it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works that no one can boast. The type of faith that's God-pleasing is supernatural. It must come from God.

In other words, it's not self-generated. The writer to the book of Hebrews reminds us that we must fix our eyes on Jesus. Why? Because he is the author and the perfecter of our faith.

[8:14] Peter recognizes both the preciousness of our faith and why it's so precious. In 2 Peter 1.1 he says, Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.

One's faith is precious because it's been received as a gift from our God and Savior Jesus Christ. It's precious because it's his and it's his gift to us.

If this all be true and it is, then is it any wonder that without faith no one can please God? Why is faith needed?

Our fourth sub-point. Listen to Romans 8, 8 and 9. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.

And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. Why is faith needed? Because in and of ourselves we can do nothing that pleases God.

[9:25] God only finds pleasure in those works produced by his Spirit. And his Spirit resides in all whom he has chosen and brought to saving faith. To move them to follow his decrees and to keep his laws is a work of the Spirit.

Thus, those good works that flow from their lives are pleasing to God because their Holy Spirit produced. This is why any thoughts, motives, or deeds that are controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

The conclusion, then, is that if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. Without faith, no one can please God, but with faith, we can please him.

So how is this faith to be used? The fifth and final sub-point. Faith is the vehicle for living a God-pleasing, Spirit-controlled life. I don't know that I've ever heard faith illustrated this way, but I'm going to give it a shot.

If you were atop the Grand Canyon, and there was somebody at the bottom who had had a bad fall, and they had massive internal bleeding, and they were going to be dead in an hour if they didn't get medical attention.

[10 : 36] It's a four-hour climb to the bottom of the canyon. Next to you is the family of this man, helpless, unable to do anything, and sitting there right next to you is a helicopter, fueled and ready to go, and you've had some flight training.

You tell the family, I'm going to do what I can, and you begin the four-hour descent down the canyon. Well, the man's going to be dead hours before you get there.

Do you think the family is going to be pleased with you, especially knowing you were able to fly that helicopter if eight hours later you arrive with their dear husband or father on your back?

You did the best you could. Well, faith is like that helicopter. It's the vehicle by which we please God. Any attempts to do good without faith will fail miserably, and it's certainly not going to please him.

If you would have made use of the helicopter, you could have been to the floor of that canyon in a minute, and you could have saved the man. But you would have done nothing that you could have taken credit for yourself, for you used what had been given you, what you did not own.

[11 : 54] And if your helicopter training would have been limited, if it was only possibly through PlayStation play, you might have had a rocky road to the bottom and back to the top.

But so it is with our faith. We must train ourselves in the proper use of faith. The more we exercise faith, the more certain and confident we become in its usage.

God does not usually call on his children immediately after their salvation to figuratively land a plane in 60-mile-an-hour crosswinds and driving rain.

But let me also comment that when he does make such a call, he provides the necessary faith. But so it is for us.

How do we train ourselves in the usage of this faith? Well, we must start by applying the fundamental truth that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

[12 : 49] We must recognize where the book is that is able to build up our most holy faith. Second, we must believe the things we read, his revelations about himself, about us, and his promises to us.

And this belief goes far beyond mere intellectual assent. True faith believes and acts on the promise that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

In other words, it's personal. A fundamental expression of true faith is a personalized belief that I, through the faith he supplies, can please him.

And in fact, pleasing God becomes my motive for living. Well, we considered Enoch as an illustration in our first point of pleasing God requires faith. Now on to our second.

We're going to stick with Enoch, only turned to the Old Testament to Genesis 5, 22-24, where we read the original account of Enoch. Genesis 5, 22-24.

[13 : 51] Our second point is that pleasing God requires walking with him. And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters.

Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God. Then he was no more, because God took him away. Twice we're given the summarizing statement of Enoch's life, that he walked with God.

The original word walked is translated elsewhere in Scripture as was pleasing, or just please. I found this rather revealing. So what was it about Enoch's life to which God is calling our attention? This fact that he walked with God. Well, it's the fact that Enoch pleased God. Enoch's life was characterized by living for the pleasure of God.

He walked with God. He pleased God in the way he walked. In past weeks, we've considered the negative side of being a people pleaser, of living for the pleasure of others.

[14 : 59] How has being a people pleaser manifested? Well, we'll adjust our schedules, our priorities, our entertainments, even our convictions, to fit another person's expectations.

The person that is living for the pleasure of God is doing very much the same thing, only instead of for people, he is doing it towards God. Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God.

1 Thessalonians 4.1 The instruction on how to live is intended for the purpose that we would know how to please God. That's our aim.

That's our ambition as we began. We walk with God, or walking with God, means living with the conscious aim of bringing Him pleasure by how I live.

Thirdly, answering the question, what exactly does it take to please God, pleasing God, requires your cooperation? Philippians 2.12-13, a familiar passage says, Therefore, my dear brothers, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.

[16:23] The phrase, to His good purpose, means to please, or to be well-pleased. Our acting out, our living, our cooperating with God is intended for His pleasure, so that He will be well-pleased.

As Priolo elaborates, it was spoken by the voice out of heaven after Jesus was baptized by John.

The same word, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased.

The English dictionary defines the verb to please as, to give enjoyment, pleasure, or satisfaction to. So what is God's purpose for working in us?

It's His enjoyment and pleasure. As I continue to work out my salvation with fear and trembling, I am cooperating with the working He's doing in me.

And the result is that God is going to be well-pleased. Priolo further observes, it is not usually necessary to wait for the Spirit to move you before you obey the Bible.

[17:26] Waiting for God to zap you with an infusion of grace from heaven rather than acting in faith, which you will remember is our first requirement for pleasing God, and doing what God has already given you the wisdom to do often amounts to delayed obedience.

obedience. Well, how is obedience to God in a certain area an act of faith? Well, I want you to follow the reasoning here. Because without the requisite working of God in our hearts, we cannot obey Him, let alone please Him.

The believer then, and yes, even the unbeliever who's coming to Christ for the very first time, must choose whether they will live by their feelings or their faith. I may not feel like obeying.

I may not feel like God is pleased with me. I may have many doubts. I can recognize even that my desires are impure and tainted at best. But when I step out in obedience to what He has commanded, I am stepping out in faith when I'm doing so, believing that He has previously given me the desire to obey, and that He is empowering me with the will to realize that desire into action, with the end result being that He will be pleased with me, because He's the one with whom I'm simply cooperating and with the work that He has already done.

So it is all of faith. For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last. Just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith.

[19:00] Romans 1.17. And then 1 John 5.4. For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

You see, all of these just keep flowing out of that foundational aspect that all is done by faith.

Fourthly, what exactly does it take to please God?

Pleasing God requires sanctification or holiness. Please turn to 1 Thessalonians 4.1. 1

Thessalonians 4.1. Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God as in fact you are living.

Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you should be sanctified, that you should avoid sexual immorality.

We often confuse the means of sanctification with the goal and may consider ourselves and others as spiritual because we see them faithful in the means of grace. By means of grace or sanctification, I'm referring to things such as church attendance, Bible reading, prayer, fasting.

[20:17] Although we will never become holy without employing these means, the mere doing of these things does not make one spiritual. An athlete may have as his goal the winning of the gold medal at the Olympics.

To accomplish it, he knows he needs to go through daily exercise or a stretching regime. He needs to eat properly, be on the right diet. All these things are simply the means for him reaching his goal. But the day that an athlete becomes satisfied because he merely did everything in his daily routine, that's the day that the goal has been lost.

He's never going to reach it. Because if our eyes are simply fixed on the means and we become satisfied because I did the means, I've missed the goal. The day the Christian becomes satisfied, pleased with himself because he's had his daily devotions or did X minutes of prayer or went to church is the day that God has ceased being pleased with him.

The believer's goal is holiness, to please God by being set apart unto God, to become like Christ. I spend time in God's word as a duty, yes, but more importantly, I go there to know my God better and in knowing to become more like Jesus.

[21 : 38] There is another aspect of sanctification that is brought out by the Evangelical Dictionary of Bible Theology. To sanctify someone or something is to set that person or thing apart for the use intended by its designer.

A pen is sanctified when used to write. Eyeglasses are sanctified when used to improve sight. In the theological sense, things are sanctified when they are used for the purpose God intends.

A human being is sanctified, therefore, when he or she lives according to God's design and purpose. The first application of living according to God's design and purpose, of course, is to seek to be like Jesus in his sinless perfection.

But there is another application that relates to what we are designed to be. How do I please God? I please him by being what he has set me apart to be. This becomes very practical.

What special gifts and skills do you have that you see few around you that do have? How specifically has God made you to be able to bring good to your sphere of influence?

[22 : 48] Now, you can either use those gifts and talents for your own selfish gain and glory or for the purpose of pleasing God and bringing glory to his name. Every day, as you go about your daily duties, have you considered that you are doing what God has set you apart to do that day?

Are you going about your activities with the goal of pleasing God by doing good to others through the calling that he's given you? In a very real sense, we are becoming more and more sanctified as we live our lives with an ever-increasing sense of this reality, depending on him for the power and the strength to accomplish the works he's given us to do.

Philippians 4.13, I can do everything through him who gives me strength. This isn't just a mere empty promise. It's a powerful reality for those living lives that are sanctified that are set apart unto God.

Well, closely linked with this idea of being sanctified unto God is a consideration of the good works that he has set us apart to do, which leads us to the fifth point.

Pleasing God requires doing good works. Turn to Colossians 1.9-10. Colossians 1.9-10. For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

[24 : 18] And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way. Bearing fruit in every good work, growing in that knowledge of God.

Our last two points are going to cover those two items. By bearing fruit in every good work, this is how we please God in every way.

That will be our first point and we'll close with growing in the knowledge of God. So under this point, why does bearing fruit please God?

Well, it's because it is through fruit bearing that we bring glory to the name of God. This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit showing yourselves to be my disciples.

John 15.8 The scripture speaks of many different types of fruit bearing. The fruit of conversion. The fruit of praise. The fruit of Christian character.

[25 : 15] Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and so forth. The fruit of charitable giving. Just to name a few. But in Colossians 1.9 and 10, Paul is specifically having a different kind of fruit in mind.

The fruit of good works. What makes a work good? M.G. Easton puts it this way. Works are good only when one, they spring from the principle of love to God.

The moral character of an act is determined by the moral principle that prompts it. Faith and love in the heart are the essential elements of all true obedience. Hence, good works only spring from a believing heart, can only be brought by one reconciled to God, and can only be brought by one

reconciled to God.

Secondly, good works have the glory of God as their object, and third, they have the revealed will of God as their only rule. In other words, works are only good and acceptable to God when done through faith.

By resting in God for the will and the power to accomplish them, for the purpose of pleasing Him, and with thanksgiving and praise to Him for the good He brings about from our cooperative efforts with Him.

[26 : 29] Are good works an optional exercise of Christian living? Well, far from it. As we just read in John 15, 8, it is the bearing of much fruit that shows ourselves to be His disciples.

Elsewhere, Jesus declares, by their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. While the fruit spoken of here is more than just the fruit of good works, it certainly includes the fruit of bearing good works. So finally, what method did Jesus declare He would use to separate the sheep from the goats?

What will be the evident Jesus cites for determining who enters eternal bliss with Him and who enters eternal damnation with the devil? Will it not be who did or did not do good works?

[27 : 43] So good works are important. If good works are so important, has God left it to happenchance for the performing of them? Again, nothing could be further from the truth.

Ephesians 2.10, for we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do. Not only has God not left our doing of good works to chance, as with our salvation, He has actually ordained beforehand the works that have been appointed for each of us to accomplish.

Let us answer a question together. What, as related to myself, is from God?

What, what am I, what do I have that is from God? Anyone? Just shout out some ideas. You need to get specific, Roger.

Everything will not do. No. I'm part, your abilities. Okay. Very good.

[28 : 50] Your abilities or lack thereof. Your heart. So our feelings, our emotions, I'm assuming you're getting to. Your mental abilities or lack thereof.

Pardon? Pardon? Your lips. Okay. Oh, looks. Well, your lips are part of your looks. What else? Okay, the time and place, the position that I've been brought into the world. The time we leave this world. Over here. Your position.

Possession. What we own, what we possess. Our job. Our job. Let me just read through what I had written down. We've covered a lot of these.

My work ethic, my mental abilities and limitations, my personality, both strengths and weaknesses, my physical capabilities and limitations, my material blessings, my earning power, my skills, my experiences, my station or position in life, where I work and the organizations to which I belong, my family, both the good and the bad, my doctrinal understanding, my home, my vehicles, my toys, my time.

[30 : 17] As Roger said, everything is from the Lord. All of it is of God and to be used for God.

Romans 11, 36, for from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be glory forevermore. Amen. Do we consciously consider that everything we are apart from our sin and everything we have is from him, operates through his sovereign purposes and is to be used for his glory?

The doing of good works is really just the sharing of what God has made me to be and given me to use for the benefit of others. Hebrews 13, 16, And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with sacrifices God is pleased, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Priolo comments on this verse, Doing good is closely connected to sharing, be it your money, your home, your food, your time, your wisdom, or a seat in your car. God is pleased when you tangibly share the things he has given you with other believers.

And I would add to that not only with other believers but to all people. For we read in Galatians 6, 10, Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people and especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

[31:40] Well, if this be true, then I must be continually considering that my every activity and responsibility and position of influence was ordained beforehand by God as a context within which I am to be doing good.

Isn't it interesting that we can have plans to do a good work but if circumstances prevent it, we become frustrated? Well, we need to stop and consider that the circumstances that changed our plans have also been ordained by God and it becomes a new context in which we are to do good. Have you considered that the job you perform within your home or place of work is an opportunity for the continual doing of good to those around you? We try to put things into a spiritual context and a worldly context and we need to stop doing that and consider that everywhere we are, everything we are doing has been ordained of God to do good works to those God has put around us. God sends his sunshine and his rain. That is a good deed that is not essentially spiritual that he does to all men.

Men, as we head off to work, do we consider as we approach that job what we can do that day that the setting we are being put into is a setting in which we are to be doing good works.

[33:04] As we return home, are we asking God to open our eyes, prepare our hearts, and grant us the grace to do good works within our household? As we enter every new situation, we must become more conscious of the fact that God has made us as we are and put us into that setting to do good to others in the best way we know how.

And we do so depending by faith on God's grace to enable us with the conscious purpose of pleasing him and with the desire to see his name lifted up.

Even as I have sought to apply this very teaching in my own life and those who know me well and though I am continually failing miserably, but I want us to put out a word of encouragement that even as we fail, we must renew our commitment before the Lord to rise again and to seek anew to live out our lives within this context of doing good.

The second way in which Colossians 1.10 declares that we please God is by growing in the knowledge of God and this is our sixth and last point we'll consider this morning. Pleasing God requires knowledge and wisdom.

Again, let us read Colossians 1.9 and 10. For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

[34:37] And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God. What does it mean to be growing in the knowledge of God?

Well, for the average American, knowledge is seen as being able to recite back a set of facts. But the idea behind the biblical use of the word knowledge is far from this concept.

I want you to listen to the following verses and I want you to tell me what you think the biblical definition of knowledge is. Short verses, three of them. Listen carefully.

Matthew 28, 20. And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Luke 11, 28. He replied, Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.

2 Timothy 2, 2. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. What do you think the definition is for growing in the knowledge of God?

[35:45] Hearing and understanding is the word. Okay, hearing and understanding. Does it stop there? Doing. Doing. So within the context of scriptures, knowledge has both the idea of hearing, of understanding, understanding, and then of doing what it is that God's word tells us.

It isn't enough to just have a set of facts in one's mind. Priolo says, Paul wanted the Colossians to be filled with the knowledge of God's will because he wanted all his disciples to know the scriptures so well that their hearts would be repositories bursting, filled with the truth necessary to determine God's will for their lives.

But it didn't end there. The ultimate purpose for this knowledge was for them to walk in such a way that would please and glorify God. Where is the knowledge found?

Again, we know it's in the scriptures. Like newborn babes crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. We must crave wisdom and seek it from God.

How often do we ask God for wisdom? This has been a challenge for me this week. I asked him much for it when I was young. I don't ask him much for it now.

[37:11] That's to my shame. We need to redouble our efforts to begin coming God daily, seeking and asking for wisdom. You remember the story of Solomon?

How in a dream God asked him for whatever he wanted and Solomon requested wisdom. What was God's response? In 1 Kings 3.10 we read, The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.

Do we understand that seeking this kind of knowledge and wisdom is pleasing to God? Just the very act of seeking knowledge and wisdom is pleasing to God.

Solomon would later write, Wisdom is supreme, therefore get wisdom. Though it costs all you have, get understanding. Are we asking God for the things we value or the things he values?

Often by what we ask we betray our values. An advantage of asking for wisdom is that through wisdom our values will begin to more closely align with God's values.

[38:20] So we need to get wisdom. And again, don't get wisdom for the sake of wisdom, for the sake of understanding. Again, to my shame as I think back to my earlier years, so often what drove me to God's word was a mental understanding of some truth so I could defend it or argue it with others.

That isn't true wisdom. That's human knowledge that puffs up. We need to be pleasing God by going to his work with the prime purpose of seeking to draw from that word a better knowledge of himself and what pleases him and then the power to be able to put it into action.

Thank you and we're dismissed. Thank you.