

Title: God Pleasers
Date: July 11, 2021
Subject: The goal of our lives is to please God.
Scripture: Selected

It's fun when kids learn new words and phrases. Michael and Aaralyn.

The same goes for older kids when they pick up new jargon. 9-year-old grandson Caleb likes to say, "that would please me" or "that would please me greatly." He uses it when asked if he'd like seconds, to ride along for an errand...or almost anything. He usually pairs it with a cheesy smile.

Do you ever think of God speaking that way? That something would please him, and please him greatly? Ever think that you can bring a smile to his face, a sense of satisfaction, some joy because of something you did that is agreeable to him?

The Bible speaks a lot about pleasing God and bringing delight to him -- at least 30 times. We'll only look into a few of the references and provide many others in the sermon notes for your personal study. Let's begin with 2 Corinthians 5:6 - 10. Today's message is the other side of the coin from last week's message as we continue to look at how to live out the relationship we have with the Lord.

READ 2 Corinthians 5:6 - 10.

1. The goal for Christians is to please the Lord.

Originally the word *please* was used to describe a cringing attitude before a superior -- bow in front of the person and quake in terror, maybe not outwardly but at least inwardly. The word came to mean complete and willing submission, willing service given to another, to do what is acceptable.

When it comes to pleasing God, there's an element of fear. V. 11 says we know what it is to fear the Lord. There's an element of awe and being just completely blown away by him, understanding the awesome power of the all-powerful being of the universe, who can do whatever he pleases. Some quaking is in order. We're not nonchalantly standing before some lightweight personage. At the same time, we remember he is our loving Father who gives every good and perfect gift.

The goal we're to have is to please the Lord. It's to be our ambition. Seek to excel in this matter. Set our will to accomplish the goal. I've heard people say they'd prefer to aim at the moon and hit an eagle rather than aim at an eagle and hit a rock. Not exactly the most patriotic or lawful thing to shoot at eagles. They're trying to convey they've set high goals rather than low ones.

Sometimes people say they're tired of the menial and trivial. They want real purpose and significance. They want to do something that matters, do something great in their lives. Some join organizations to fight against tyranny, to clean the planet or feed the hungry. Others seek to make a bajillion dollars. Those goals are like aiming at a rock. The highest and greatest and most rewarding goal a person could have is to please the Lord.

The teaching about pleasing the Lord is in a discussion about death and the transition to heaven. Pleasing God can be accomplished whether we're at home in the body or away from it. Being away from it would mean we're in our forever home in heaven where it will be easier to please the Lord as it will be automatic. We'll be unable to do anything that displeases Him.

Therefore, our concern has to be with what we do in this life.

Every person has a goal of pleasing someone. They may not verbalize in terms of a goal or aim or ambition. But it's what underlies how they live. Are they self-oriented, doing what they do for their own pleasure? Are they others oriented, serving other people, to please them? Or do they seek to please the Lord?

John Kerry was a Senator during the first Gulf War. He received a letter from a constituent named Walter Carter who urged the Senator to support booting Iraq out of Kuwait. Carter got two separate responses. The first letter agreed and stated how the Senator strongly supported the first President Bush's position. The second letter wasn't a duplicate. It was an oops. It thanked Mr. Carter for his opposition to the war and pointed out that Kerry had voted against the war resolution (Traditional Values Report, June/July, 1991).

Though politicians and others try to please opposite sides at the same time, it doesn't work. We can't both please God and anything else at the same time.

2. Those who please the Lord will be rewarded. This is one component of our motivation. The judgment seat of Christ is the Bema. It's the place where believers will receive their rewards. In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul spoke of building on the foundation of Christ by using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw (1 Corinthians 3:11 - 15). Christ will hand out his rewards and awards according to how we've lived out the Christian life - whether it was done to please ourselves or to please him. Only what's done to please him will last.

Another incentive is what God has done for us. He's been acting in our lives according to his pleasure. He's chosen us to become part of his family, and not as a little child. Rather, He's adopted us as adult heirs (Ephesians 1:5).

If the goal of followers of Jesus Christ is to please the Lord and we'll be rewarded for pleasing the Lord, it makes sense that we find out what pleases Him.

3. We're to find out what pleases the Lord.

READ Ephesians 5:8 - 10.

A contrast is provided -- our past identity and the current reality. Those who've placed their trust in Jesus Christ to be their Savior are children of light. The switch has been made. The change has occurred. This fits in with what we saw earlier about becoming God's adopted children. This designation is present in v. 1. We're dearly loved children, not some offspring that's barely acknowledged to have loose ties to the family.

Prior to that we were not only living in darkness but were comprised of darkness, more sinister and evil than the dark side of all those Star Wars movies. We were intellectually ignorant, blinded to knowing God and morally evil. The deeds, activities and thoughts of the darkness definitely don't please the Lord. Vv. 11 & 12 command us: READ Ephesians 5:11, 12.

We can go earlier in the passage. READ Ephesians 5:3 - 4. Sexual immorality and impurity. Doubling down in the same area of finding sexual satisfaction outside of the marriage relationship between a man and a woman, whether it's adultery, pornography or takes other forms. Greed. The desire and drive to possess more at any cost. It's most often linked to money and material goods but is also connected to immorality. Obscenity, foolish talk and coarse joking which are dirty jokes, sexual humor, vulgarities, mocking God, obscenities.

People who live these kinds of lifestyles - who desire to follow after the ways of the sin nature, self and the devil - will be judged by God. They cause his wrath to come on disobedience. They have no inheritance in Christ and God's Kingdom.

V. 7 tells us not to partner with these kinds of activities. We're to steer clear of these kinds of things. We aren't to allow our mind to think about and focus on these things or dwell on these sorts of evils. We had been that kind of person before we came to know Christ as Savior. We had been addicted to them. An addict needs to stay away from that to which he had been addicted.

God has washed us clean, set us apart as being in a right relationship with him and declared us not guilty of our sins. All this is because of Jesus Christ and our trust in him (1 Corinthians 6:9 - 11).

Now we're to find out what pleases the Lord. Learn, discern, probe and think about it. Search to discover God's will and understand it (Ephesians 5:17). Seek to be imitators of God, to be and act like him (Ephesians 5:1). Obviously, there are many aspects of God's character we can't copy. We can't be everywhere present. We can't have all knowledge. We can be wise and not unwise (Ephesians 5:15). We can be forgiving. We can serve others. We can be loving and gracious and merciful. We can live a life of love (Ephesians 5:2).

Earlier we saw some things not to do and by not doing them we please the Lord. Let's look at another passage that phrases it in a more encouraging way. READ Colossians 1:9 - 14.

It's another grand prayer request given in Scripture. The language is similar to what we've seen. We've been rescued from darkness and brought into Christ's kingdom. We have redemption from the clutches of the devil. Our sins have been forgiven. All that we have is because of what Jesus Christ has done. This is the basis for the request: since we know Christ as Savior. Therefore, pray that we'd continually be filled with a knowledge and understanding of God's desires and plans. This comes about as we grow in spiritual wisdom which in turn comes as we feed on his Word.

The mere accumulation of facts and knowledge of truths isn't the desired end. The purpose of the prayer is revealed in v. 10. Wisdom is to be put into practice. It's to be put on display, in a good sense of the term. It isn't for showing off to people. It's that we may live lives that are worthy of the Lord and please him in every way.

Four specific ways are given. The first is bearing fruit in every good work. Good works don't enable us to be saved. We don't perform them to gain merit or grace with God. They're to be done as thanks to God for what he has done. We're to be active in doing those things which are good because he's been good to us.

Growing in the knowledge of God. It's kind of come full circle. The request is to be filled with the knowledge of his will, which really comes about as we know God more and more intimately. We're to learn about his character. We're to learn about his actions and plans – creation, salvation, restoration and much more.

Being strengthened. God wants to be active in our lives, to do things we aren't able to do in and of ourselves. Strengthen according to his might. Strengthening isn't for show either. It's so we can have great endurance and patience. If the Christian life were simple and easy, there'd be no need for endurance or perseverance or patience. They're necessary because of the things we go through, the trials and difficulties of life. They're also necessary because we have to wait for the complete fulfillment of God's promises - heaven and being with him forever in a perfect place in fully restored relationship with Him.

The last request is joyfully giving thanks to the Father. Thank him for what he's done. We might think the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light is future oriented. That's a major part of the inheritance. However, it's something that's also a present reality. It's fellowship with others who are saints. It's connection with others even as is happening when we gather. We're already experiencing this aspect of the kingdom.

We're to please him in every way. Some phrase this as being all-pleasing or wholly pleasing.

4. Increase our pleasing of God

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1, 2

There's to be growth in the way we live, in the way we please God. This comes across by using the words to “do this more and more.” Increase our capacity. Increase the occasions when we please him. We're engaged in cultivating the crop of pleasing God. We concentrate our efforts and focus them on this.

It's also conveyed by the verbs ask and urge. Ask is more of a polite request, not quite the same as “pretty please with sugar and sprinkles on top.”

Urge is the picture of a strength coach standing beside someone who is doing multiple repetitions of lifting weights. The coach gets close and shouts, “Give me one more! One more! Keep going! You can do it!” To find out what pleases the Lord and to do it requires discipline.

It's like gardening. If we want to grow weeds, we don't have to do very much. They grow just fine without any effort from us. But if we want to grow beans, cucumbers, carrots and tomatoes -- we have to keep pulling out the weeds, watering and fertilizing. It's a constant fight. We have to get our hands dirty in the task.

We're to strive to continue to advance in the expression of the holy lifestyle to which God has called us. We're to please God more and more and more.

Paul refers to having previously instructed them. This would have been when he was in person and through letters he'd have written, including letters not in Scripture. We have instructions in the form of God's Word, the Bible. The instructions aren't limited to only those Scriptures which specifically use “pleasing to God.” All Scripture is beneficial in aiding us in our quest. They tell us how we're to live in order to please God.

We saw commands connected with other texts which referenced pleasing God. The same is true here. V. 3 – It's God's will to be sanctified which is to be set apart for his purposes. Then it elaborates on some of

those things that aid in being sanctified. The first is to avoid sexual immorality. That command runs from verse 3 through 8. VV. 9, 10 - love for others who are followers of Jesus Christ. VV. 11 and 12 -- live productive lives and not be busybodies. V. 13 begins a long discussion about how we're to live in the light of the second coming. At the end of the book there's a ton of final instructions beginning in 5:12.

READ 2 Thessalonians 5:16 - 18

The book of Romans has this challenge: "Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:1, 2).

Because of Christ's incredible self-giving sacrifice through which he brings salvation and forgiveness of sins, we're strongly encouraged (commanded) to give ourselves as living sacrifices, to present ourselves in his service. This is pleasing to God. This is the way to worship him, putting him first and not ourselves first. We're to be like Christ, suppressing our self-will, being obedient to God's will. God's will is first, foremost, uppermost and exclusive. Our lives will be transformed as we renew our minds in the things of God.

Queen Mary loved to visit Scotland. She was so adored that she often ventured into public without a security detail. One afternoon, while walking with some children, a storm started brewing. She stopped at a house to borrow an umbrella. "If you will lend me one, I will send it back to you tomorrow." The woman didn't recognize the Queen in that setting and was reluctant to give her best umbrella to a stranger. She handed her one whose fabric was torn and a rib was broken. She intended to throw it away so it wouldn't be a loss.

The next day, there was a knock at the door. The woman opened it to be greeted by a royal guard. He was holding her old, tattered umbrella. "The Queen sent me. She asked me to thank you for loaning her this." The woman was stunned. She lamented the missed opportunity of not giving the Queen her very best. She had sought to please herself rather than her sovereign.

During John Kennedy's inaugural address, he issued a stirring challenge to Americans: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." Ask not what the Lord God can do for us; ask what we can do for our Lord God. God has already done everything for us.....What can we do for Him?

Benediction. "May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O LORD, our rock and our redeemer" (Psalm 19:14, New Living Translation). "Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Hebrews 13:20, 21).