

“Pleasing God”

Text: Colossians 1:9-14

Series: Book of Colossians [#02]

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Theme: **God Provides All You Need To Please Him.**

Introduction.

I came across a survey one pastor gave to his congregation. I’ve modified it a bit. Let’s try it. Answer true or false to the following questions (to yourself will be fine). Do you think:

- You must do nothing to upset others. [True or False]
- You must work harder to make things better for others.
- How others respond to you is very important to how you feel about yourself.
- Saying “No” is generally difficult and uncomfortable.
- You feel have to accommodate other’s schedules, and don’t feel comfortable asking them to accommodate yours.
- You think you have to always put others first and yourself last.
- If you answered true to three or more of these questions, you might be a *people pleaser*.

Whether you see yourself as a people pleaser or not, and however important you think pleasing others is or is not, all of us who have placed our faith in Jesus Christ will probably agree that it is very important to please Him. But what does that really mean? How do we do it?

We get some help for this as we take our second look at the book of Colossians this morning. Paul wrote this positive letter to warn the church about errors that were beginning to swirl around them and also to encourage them be steadfast. They didn’t need and should not tolerate either the Jewish legalisms or Greek philosophies being pitched at them. His theme is the sufficiency and supremacy of Christ. Christ makes you complete. In verses 9-14 of chapter 1 Paul writes about “Pleasing God” and the wonderful truth is that *God provides all you need to please Him*. We begin with looking at the goal of “Pleasing God.”

The Goal.

The first part of the goal is to live a Christ-worthy life. This New Testament direction to *walk or live* in a manner worthy of the Lord and our of calling is familiar, but not always clear and may be confusing to us. For there is a sense in which we never can be worthy of Christ. He is God the Son, the perfect One who graciously took our sin upon Himself *because* it is impossible for us to meet the test of worthiness, to meet God’s holy demands. So we can say with John the Baptist, “I am not worthy even to untie the thong of His sandal” (*cf.* John 1:27).

But there is also a sense in which we can and should live a Christ-worthy life. We will see some specifics in these verses, but for now note some broad strokes. We can and should live ...

- a life that reflects what Christ saved us *from*—from the control and judgment of sin, from the dead-end values and pursuits of this world;
- a life that reflects what Christ saved us *to*—holiness, joy, certainty, fellowship with our Creator, obedience to Him and service for Him;
- a life where the character of Christ is developed and displayed by the Holy Spirit in us.
- and, a life where Christ is #1—above myself, my family, friends and my ambitions, remembering that Jesus said “He who loves father or mother more than Me is *not worthy* of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is *not worthy* of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is *not worthy* of Me.”

(Matthew 10:37-38)

And so Paul tells the Colossian believers in verse 10 that he is praying that they “will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord,” just as he wrote in other letters. To please God we must live a Christ-worthy life.

The second part of the goal is to live a Christ-pleasing life. Verse 10 also says he is praying that they would “please [the Lord] in all respects.” Go back to the people pleasing survey. While the degree varies, all of us have a drive to please and a dread of displeasing others. We try not to displease, not to annoy, not to upset others (although sometimes we are convinced that is exactly what some people are trying to do to us!). We try to please, give others a sense of pleasure or satisfaction; to make them smile; to help them feel happy, good and even proud.

Again, we will see Paul’s specific points here shortly, but now note some broad strokes of a Christ-pleasing life. Romans 8:8 tells us the unsaved cannot please God. This is an absolute, regardless of their degree of integrity, sacrifice and love.

For God’s people, we read in the Old Testament that God was not delighted with sacrifices just because they were offered, but only when offered with a true, faithful, humble heart that then overflowed with God-pleasing conduct (*cf.* Psalm 51:16-17; Micah 6:6-8).

As well, we cannot escape the connection between obedience to God and pleasing God. Jesus showed us the way by a life of obedience to God the Father. In John 8: He said, beginning at verse 28,

“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.”

And so the apostle John wrote in his first letter, chapter 3, at verse 21,

“Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.”

(21-22)

We also know this bringing delight to the heart of God involves a learning process. Paul told the Ephesians believers to “walk as children of Light ... trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord” (5:8b-10). And, as Paul tells us here, we are to please Christ “in all respects,” or “in every . . . So this is the goal. A great goal: to live a Christ-worthy and a Christ-pleasing life. We want to do this, but how do we measure how we are doing?

The Measurements Of Achieving The Goal.

There are different kinds of goals. The most common are those that focus on an event, an achievement or a milestone. For example, winning a game or championship, graduating from High School or University, getting the job you really want, or buying the car or house of your dreams. When you’ve accomplished it, you can *check it off* and move on to another goal.

Then there are goals not tied to a one-time event or achievement. For example, being able to take one day at a time, having a sense of calm, peace, certainty. These goals are a *quality* of life rather than a *milestone* of life; an ongoing process rather than a one-time event or achievement.

Pleasing God through a Christ-worthy and Christ-pleasing life is a quality of life, an ongoing goal and experience. There is always room for growth and development. There is no finish line I can cross and say, “I’ve made it. Now I can move on to something else.”

How do we measure, more importantly, how does God measure our status and progress toward this goal? Paul gives us four measurements of a Christ-honoring and pleasing life in verses 10-12.

First, there is faithful, fruitful service. In verse 10 Paul says that he is praying for the Colossian believers to “[bear] fruit in every good work.” Note that this is a prayer for and a measurement of ongoing faithfulness—“in every good work.” He is not talking about taking on and completing a specific project or ministry. Nor is he speaking of just some aspects of our service, or even the majority of our service, but “in every good work.”

Bearing fruit in every good work is part of our purpose, part of who we are as new creations in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:10 tells us

“we are [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

No believer is recreated as or called to be a spectator. And, as we noted last week, Jesus tells us in John 15:16,

“You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain.”

Faithful, fruitful service involves ...

- being productive in *quantity* and *quality*;
- stepping out, stretching out to be with someone in a difficult time, allowing God to bring His comfort and encouragement through you;
- sharing the reality of Christ with a friend or acquaintance;
- doing what needs to be done;
- accepting and loving a person not very acceptable or loveable;
- being dependable and faithful in small and large, unnoticed and noticed responsibilities.

Faithful, fruitful service is a measurement of a Christ-worthy and Christ-pleasing life.

The second measurement is a growing knowledge of God. Still in verse 10, Paul writes that he is praying that they would be “increasing in the (full)knowledge of God.” There is no substitute and there is no shortcut to growing in the knowledge of God. It requires time in God’s Word—reading, thinking and applying it to ourselves. It requires living God’s Word—letting the truth we learn direct and govern our thinking, what we say and do.

We all know about this. We have heard it more times than we may want to have heard it. *Same old, same old.* But why then ...

- do we read survey after survey, year after year that shows decline after decline in Bible knowledge in evangelical churches?
- Why do only just over half of evangelical Christians, according to some polls, believe that Christ was sinless and just under half believe Satan is real?
- Why does a Pastor have to say that people he describes as fully devoted followers of Christ in the church he serves don’t know how to read their Bibles between services?

Are we increasing, are you increasing in the knowledge of God? If so, how much have we increased, how much have you increased in your knowledge of God in the last year?

Measurement number three is a steadfast character. As we move into verse 11, Paul’s prayer moves on to the believers “attaining of all steadfastness and patience.” The word “steadfast” or “endurance” literally has the idea of remaining, of standing firm or holding up under something such as a load, burden or challenge. It was used of soldiers who held their position even under heavy attack. They stood firm. They held their ground.

And so Paul is talking about being steadfast, holding our ground in the truth, not just intellectually, but in daily living. Being steadfast or having endurance is important in the development of character as seen in Paul's description in Romans 5 and James' description in the first chapter of his letter. James 1:2-4,

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces *endurance*. And let *endurance* have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

The opposite is seen in Jesus' word picture of “a reed shaken with the wind” (Matthew 11:7) and James' word picture of “the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind” (1:6). It is seen again in Paul's picture in Ephesians 4:14,

“we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.”

Rather than this, be steadfast.

Then there is *patience*. Being *long-suffering* and *long-tempered* rather than *short-suffering*, and *short-tempered*. These two qualities are first cousins and their state in our character is a measurement of living a Christ-worthy and Christ-pleasing life.

Then the fourth and last measurement we see here is joyful thankfulness. Let's pick it up with the last word in verse 11, “joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.”

Paul is talking about a character of joyful thankfulness. As we saw last week when looking at verse 3, Paul had a genuine character of joyful thankfulness that flowed upward to God. We can be, should be and will be thankful as we focus on the reality that God “has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.” He has, as we see in verse 13, “rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.”

Our goal is to live a Christ-worthy and Christ-pleasing life. These four measurements tell us how we are doing. You may be thinking, “That's nice. It would be great. But, *me?* There's no way I can do that.” If you are thinking that, you are right. There is no way you can do it. But God can. *God provides all you need to please Him*. How do we get there from here?

The Means To Achieving The Goal.

The first means is having spiritual insight. Go back up to verse 9.

“For this reason also, since the day we heard of it [i.e. their faith in Christ and love in the Spirit], we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.”

Spiritual insight. Let's be honest, many Christians see this as something that is almost magical, or a gift to just a few. And even if it might be available to us, we don't know how it's developed, what goes on with this special insight from God.

A man was killing time at the airport as he waited for his flight when he noticed a machine that was supposed to tell you your height, weight and other information. Even though he was sceptical, he dropped in some coins. The digitized voice of the machine said "You are a Canadian. You are 5'10" tall. You weigh 150 pounds and you are booked on flight #408 for Los Angeles."

The man couldn't believe it. There had to be a gimmick. So, he went to a rest room, changed his clothes, pulled a hat down to hide his face and hobbled like a crippled old man. He dropped in the coins again and waited. The machine said, "You are a Canadian. You are 5'10" tall. You weigh 150 pounds, and while you were changing clothes, your plane left for Los Angeles." He never did figure it out. It remained an unanswered mystery.

Having spiritual insight remains a mystery for some believers. Every believer can be filled with spiritual insight. With the knowledge of God's will, or understanding of His truth, what He has done and will do, what He expects of us. All believers can be filled with spiritual wisdom and understanding, and so be able to sort out and reject all the false voices that call to us.

The word *filled* is a common word. We know that a glass full of water is one in which water occupies the space in the glass. But the word used here goes beyond occupying to *controlling*. It was used of the wind *filling* the sails of a ship and so controlling, propelling the ship onward. We are fulfilling our goal of a Christ-worthy and Christ-pleasing life when we are *filled* with, *controlled* by and propelled by spiritual insight.

And the good news is that God is the source of that insight. Paul does not say, "Fill your self up with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." He says, "be filled." Connect the dots to James 1,

"if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to *all* generously and without reproach, and it *will be given* to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." (verses 5-8)

God provides the spiritual insight you and I need. *God provides all you need to please Him.*

The second means to our goal is strength from God. Drop down to verse 11 where Paul prays that they would be "strengthened with all power, according to [God's] glorious might." Aren't you glad achieving the goal does not depend on your own strength, your own ability? *I certainly am!*

The last verse of Isaiah 40 tells us ...

“those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.”

Those who wait for God will gain new strength. Literally, it is *change* or *exchange* their strength. When we look to God, trusting Him, we can *exchange* our limited human strength for His unlimited divine strength!

You see, you can't get there from here in your own strength. But In God's strength you will grow in character, you will honor, you please and glorify Christ! Yes, *God provides all you need to please Him.*

Now there is one thing that we need to do here, that is to set our sights on God's grace in Christ. Go on to the last word of verse 11 again,

“joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

God in Christ has ...

- forgiven all our sins;
- rescued, redeemed us, brought us out of slavery to sin;
- transferred, brought us into His glorious kingdom;
- and given us an inheritance with Himself.

Where are your sights when you think of yourself in relation to God? On your past mistakes or achievements? On your limitations or weaknesses, on your strengths or accomplishments? On the voices that call out and say you need something else, you need something more to be complete?

Your sights, my sights are to be set squarely on God's grace in Christ. Turn ahead to chapter 2, verse 18.

“Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.”

We see this stated positively at the beginning of Hebrews chapter 12,

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, *fixing our eyes on Jesus*, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Set your sights squarely on Christ, on God’s grace to you in Him.

Conclusion.

“*Pleasing God*”—an important goal that you and I can live out because God provides all we need to please Him. A man was driving home late one night when he realized he was almost out of gas. And then he was. Fortunately, his car coasted to a stop in front of a building with pumps, and it was open! *What a relief!* But the relief was short lived. He talked to the attendant and discovered that this was a truck stop. They had plenty of diesel fuel, but no gas for his car. There was a huge supply of fuel, but it was of no value to him.

Isn’t it wonderful to know that God has an unlimited supply of all that we need to please Him *and* that He makes it available in the exact way we need it *and* at all times, *and* in all circumstances!

As you go to God now in these next quiet moments, thank Him that He provides all you need to please Him. This is His word, His promise to you. Stand in and on it. As well, begin the process of evaluating how you are doing in pleasing God by the measurements we’ve seen today.

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