

Find Out What Is Pleasing to the Lord

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Taught at Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, Florida
May 13, 2015

Open your Bibles this evening to Ephesians 5. I want to begin our study by reading the first 17 verses of this chapter. We won't be covering all 17 verses—our focus will be one specific phrase in verse 10—but to get the context, let's begin reading with verse 1. Paul writes—

Ephesians 5:1–17 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and **try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord**. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Paul begins this chapter by exhorting us to “be imitators of God as beloved children” (v. 1). He then points us to the example of Christ and tells us to “walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us” (v.1)

In verse 8 he exhorts us to “walk as children of light” and adds “for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.” Where we find goodness and righteousness and truth, we will find evidence of the presence of light. Here, as in verse 1, he is pointing to Christ—Jesus is the light of the world (John 1). Where we find goodness and righteousness and truth, we will find evidence of Christ at work. In verse 14 Paul quotes from an early church hymn that speaks of Christ shining His light in salvation. He concludes that we are to be careful how we walk, to be wise and not foolish, that we might understand and walk according to God's will.

We are to be imitators of God and walk in the light. But what does “walking in the light” look like? How can we do this? Paul helps us answer the question of “how” in verse 10—

Ephesians 5:8b–10 Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

He sets us on a quest for understanding, telling us to **“try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.”**

This verse is rendered different ways in our English translations of the Bible:

And find out what pleases the Lord... (NIV)

Proving what is well-pleasing to the Lord (ASV)

...trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. (NASB)

...finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. (NKJV)

The NRSV recasts the verse as a command:

Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. (NRSV)

The word for *discern* (δοκιμάζοντες) is a word that means “to prove, to find out or to test.” The word for *pleasing* (εὐάρεστον) means “acceptable or satisfying.” We are to *discern* what is *pleasing* to the Lord. In other words, we are to **prove or seek out** what is **acceptable or satisfying** to the Lord.

This evening, before we take time to pray, I want to take a few moments to go to the Scriptures and explore this together. Think about these questions:

What is it that pleases God?

What is it that brings Him delight?

Answering these questions is important because they lead us to another question:

**To what should we be giving our time and energy, if we are going to walk as children of light?
Where should we find our pleasure and delight as imitators of God?**

Trying to discern what is pleasing to the Lord is a primary pursuit for those who would follow Christ. If we know what pleases God, from the light and testimony of His Word, we will have a strong foundation for our lives. We will have a right focus that will keep us centered and on the right path. If we learn what is pleasing to God, we will find ultimate pleasure and purpose for ourselves. We were made for God. We were made to please Him.

So ask yourself: **What is it that pleases God?**

What does He delight in?

- Ezekiel 18:32 For I have **no pleasure** in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.”
- Ezekiel 33:11 Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have **no pleasure** in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

God would have us turn to Him and live! This is His joy.

6) God delights in our worship

We see this all through the psalms, as we are called to lift prayers and praise to God.

- Psalms 135:3 Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good;
sing to his name, for it is **pleasant** [it is **well-pleasing**]
- Psalms 147:1 Praise the LORD!
For it is good to sing praises to our God;
For it is **pleasant**, and a song of praise is fitting.
- Psalms 69:30–31 I will praise the name of God with a song;
I will magnify him with thanksgiving.
This will **please** the LORD more than an ox
or a bull with horns and hoofs.

7) God delights in our walking by faith

Enoch is given in Scripture as an example of one who walked by faith. He is described in Genesis 5:25 as “one who walked with God, and was not, for God took Him.” The writer of Hebrews explains—

- Hebrews 11:5–6 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having **pleased** God. And without faith it is impossible to **please** him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

God is pleased when we put our trust in Him and walk by faith. He is pleased when we believe His Word and His promises and live out our days acknowledging that He is present with us and He is Lord over all.

8) God delights in our walking in obedience (pursuing righteousness, joy and peace)

God is pleased when we seek to know His will and live according to His Word. Paul describes a life that is committed to God as a pleasing sacrifice—

- Romans 12:1–2 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and **acceptable** [well pleasing] to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 14:17–19 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is **acceptable** [well pleasing] to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

This echoes the language of the Old Testament, where the sacrifices were described as pleasing to the Lord—

Numbers 15:3 and you offer to the LORD from the herd or from the flock a food offering or a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or at your appointed feasts, to make a **pleasing** aroma to the LORD,

God is pleased when we do what is right and good.

Proverbs 11:1 A false balance is an abomination to the LORD,
but a just weight is his **delight**.

Proverbs 11:20 Those of crooked heart are an abomination to the LORD,
but those of blameless ways are his **delight**.

Proverbs 12:22 Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD,
but those who act faithfully are his **delight**.

This call to obedience includes children!

Colossians 3:20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this **pleases** the Lord.

Now, we must remember, that God's pleasure in us, even when we obey Him, is rooted in Christ. Though God certainly takes pleasure in our desires to obey and do what is right, in ourselves—apart from Christ, the Bible makes clear that we cannot do right and please God.

Romans 8:8 Those who are in the flesh cannot **please** God.

Without the work of God for us, through the work of His Son, and in us, by the power of His Spirit, God could not take pleasure in us. It is God who saves us when we come to Him in repentance and faith. He justifies us, declaring us righteous in His Son. We are righteous because of what Jesus has done, because of His obedience. His obedience is credited to us. And His obedience is delightful to God.

God not only justifies us, declaring us righteous in Christ. He sanctifies us, conforming us to the image of His Son, making us more and more like Christ. And this pleases Him! It is God Himself who is at work in us, strengthening us and maturing us to walk according to His will.

Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good **pleasure**.

Listen to the prayer near the end of the book of Hebrews—

Hebrews 13:20–21 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is **pleasing** in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

9) God delights in our proclaiming and sharing the gospel

1 Corinthians 1:21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it **pleased** God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

Galatians 1:16 [God] . . . was **pleased** to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles. . .

1 Thessalonians 2:4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to **please** God who tests our hearts.

10) God delights in our sharing in the work of ministry

Hebrews 13:16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are **pleasing** to God.

Paul gives us an example of this in the book of Philippians, where the church in Philippi shared in meeting his needs and sending him a gift. He reports—

Philippians 4:18 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and **pleasing** to God.

11) God delights in giving us the kingdom (the treasures of heaven)

Jesus comforts his disciples in Luke 12 and tells them not to be anxious for their lives, what they will eat and drink—God provides all we need and He will accomplish all He has said. He tells them in verse 31 to seek His Kingdom, and all that they need will be provided. And then he comforts them—

Luke 12:32 “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good **pleasure** to give you the kingdom.

God not only promises to give us the treasures of heaven that are found in knowing Christ, He **delights** in giving them to us.

And finally, most importantly, we come full circle from where we started—

12) God delights in giving us Himself

Psalms 16:11 You make known to me the path of life;
 in your presence there is fullness of joy;
 at your right hand are **pleasures** forevermore.

We are made for God. Our purpose and wellbeing are bound up in Him. We are made to know Him and love Him, and it is only in knowing Him and loving Him that we can find true joy and delight and satisfaction. Outside of Christ—outside of God’s provision for us in Him—there is no lasting joy or true satisfaction.

We must have God to have pleasure—and it is His pleasure to give us Himself.

I mentioned earlier that this quest **to discern what is pleasing to the Lord** is our primary pursuit—one that gives us right focus and firm foundation for life.

We too often spend our time and our energies seeking our own pleasures that turn out to be temporary and often destructive and damaging. By knowing what is pleasing to God, we can know what is best for us—and that is finding God Himself in Christ by the power of His Spirit.

If you would discern what is pleasing to God:

- **Seek to know Him in His Word.** Keep yourself under the faithful teaching and preaching of God’s Word. Stay in the Word. Study it. Read it. And aim to walk in obedience and faith.
- **Turn to Him for salvation.** Hear His call to you to come to Him and live. Stop trusting in yourself and your own works and plans. Look to Christ and the gospel for your hope and salvation.
- And **Invest yourself in serving and encouraging others**—in your families, in the church, in the community. This is what God is doing as He invades lives and turns us around from going down a path of darkness and destruction to pursuing a life of light and edification. Share the gospel with others. Share in ministry to others.

These are all basic things—central things to our faith. But they are the things that God has said that are pleasing to Him. Knowing what pleases God should shape our own lives and pursuits, as we walk in obedience to Him and live for His glory.

We should make pleasing God our all-consuming goal for as long as we live.

2 Corinthians 5:6–9

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to **please him.**

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